

**Sermon preached in Immanuel Episcopal
Church, Highlands, DE**

January 24, 2021 | Epiphany 3B

The Rev. Curtis A. Kennington

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:6-14;

1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

Simon and Andrew were casting a net into the
sea...

for they were fishermen.

Day after day it was the same thing;

the same sea, the same net, the same boat.

Day after day

it was wind, water, fish, sore muscles, torn
nets.

Cast the net, pull it in;

then you mend it.

This was the life of Simon and Andrew
and James and John.

Anyone else feel like the repeat button

is being continuously pressed?

A year of isolation, masks,

stay in, stay away, stay safe.

We cast the nets. We mend the nets.

Casting and mending

to make a living, to feed our family, to
pay the bills.

Casting and mending to feel secure.

To hold the family together.

To feel purpose and move forward.

I like mending the nets.

Fishing. Casting.

It is finite. It is quantifiable.

It is safe. It is predictable.

Then Jesus comes along.
Simon and Andrew,
James and John, they're fishing.
They are not looking for Jesus.

Some days, neither am I.
Just looking to make it through the day.
Jesus shows up and calls out in the
ordinary places of life.

He did this last week to Samuel.
He does this with Jonah.
He did this with Mary and Moses.
That's what he does
to your life and my life.
Jesus calls us, "Follow me."

"Immediately they left their nets and followed
him."
"They left their father Zebedee in the boat...
and followed him."
IMMEDIATELY.
This term is used over forty times
in Mark's gospel.
Forty. That's a biblical
number for A LOT.

When Jesus calls, we answer.
Immediately. All the time. Forever.
And Mark records no discussions, no questions,
no goodbyes.

I am certain if dear St. Mark were writing about
me—
when he gets to the part
when Jesus says, "Follow me," what
would follow is:

"...and immediately the questions came...

Where are we going...
What will we do...
Can you say how long we'll be gone...
What should I pack...
Where will we stay?

I don't mind this label.
For example, in the case of another story
involving our brother Peter,
he wondered, "What will this mean to my
wife, my family?"

He knew that responding to the call of Jesus was
good
regardless of the consequences,
and he had regrets and failures
and a crisis of confidence,
and all that came to pass
because the light of
Epiphany
remained with him
burning steady to the
end.

We can also relate to this.
That's the hard part for most of us.
We're pretty good holding on to the
familiar;
not so good at letting go.

Growth takes some letting go,
and we won't get anywhere
if we're unwilling to leave where we are.
We accept Jesus' invitation to follow,
not by packing up, or turning
away.
We accept by letting go.

"Follow me" is an invitation to new life.
What do we need to let go of and leave
behind so that we might follow Jesus?

It can be bad habits or negative
misgivings—the obvious things.
It can be customs and traditions that define
our daily lives,
our family time, our church even.

They will be difficult to let go of.
But friends, please don't think this is simply
about changing careers,
disowning our family, or starting all new
rituals.

It is about freedom.
Freedom to be fully alive.
Freedom to hearing God's call for us.
And responding with our whole
heart.

We let go and we follow
so our life may be reoriented,
so we can now travel in a new direction,
so we will be open to a life of
God's love.

Most of us are called to follow our Lord
at the very same time when we feel challenged
to remain where we are, good or bad.

Dr. King heard the call of God,
A call that filled him with an unshakable
conviction
that all human beings, regardless of the
color of their skin,
are created in the image of God.
For this, he was killed.

Theresa heard the call of God,
and she found herself among the least of these,
living the rest of her life in the slums of
India.

So many of us have heard this call,
and find ourselves serving the community
through teaching Sunday School
or singing in the choir
or serving Friendship House
and more.

Our friends Tom Murray and Suzanne Moon
sit out in this little gathering.
Both heard the call to be healers.
To touch lives in their darkest
hour. To bring hope.
Often to bring bad news.
They heard, responded,
followed.

Saying yes to God is a life of abundance, and it can
mean suffering.
It will mean a life of love.

Look at John the Baptist.
Look at Jesus.
They were faithful to the end, even to
death.

How often do we drop everything and follow when
God calls?

Do we even recognize the voice of Jesus when he
calls?

Do we tend to be like Mary, full of grace,
who hears and responds?

Or, do we tend to be more like Jonah,
who winds up in a fish for three days
cause he runs as fast as he can from
the call?

Here's a confession, I lean towards Jonah.
I can be slow and reluctant...drag my feet.

How about you?
Our list of excuses may be endless.
Here's some good news, because there's
always good news.

First, God knows it's hard.
God, the Almighty Creator of Heaven and
Earth,
came down as Jesus, and saw and
experienced our lives
and knows it's hard.

It's complicated and full
and expensive and conflict-ridden
and troublesome and full of struggles.

God also know there is great beauty in this human
life.

Great beauty and great love.
Potential and a capacity for wonderful
things.
We are so capable.

More good news...this is my favorite.

God gives us companions.
Friends, even.

In one stroll along the shore, Jesus
called at least four people
to work and live together.

We are not alone in this call.

We have each other.
We walk side by side.

Believe me, I would not be here,
as a priest or father or husband
or friend
if I did not have those who
walk with me.
That includes you.

And, those who have gone before.
That great cloud of witnesses.

Not just Jonah and Andrew and Martin Luther
King.
Friends and family, and heroes, and so many
others.
We are not alone.

We are called to follow Jesus.
To stop and follow.
To bring forth the Kingdom of Heaven
on earth to all.

A Kingdom of good. Of reconciliation. Of light
and love.

When we hear that voice, we will know.
We must trust it, embrace it, answer it.

Today, this cold winter morning, and everyday,

May the light of Epiphany shine upon us
that we will see, recognize, hear and respond
to God
when we too, together, are called to
follow.

AMEN

