

3rd Sunday after Epiphany—Year B—January 24, 2021
(texts: Jonah 3:1-5, 10 & Mark 1:14-20)

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Disclaimer: this was written and recorded before Noon on January 20th.

I invite you to pray with me: Let the words of mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.”¹

Rolf Jacobson, Old Testament Professor at Luther Seminary, suggested on the podcast, “Working Preacher,” that this verse—verse 15—is the “keynote/theme verse for the whole Gospel [of Mark], at least for the first 8 chapters.”²

That being said, as we begin our reading through Mark during this Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary, let us think about what exactly this verse is saying.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.”³

“The time is fulfilled”/“the kingdom of God has come near”—it’s time!!!

The beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, following John’s arrest seems to mark a new age. God’s kin-gom is not just some far off thing that we will get

¹ Mark 1:15, NRSV.

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/765-third-sunday-after-epiphany-ord-3b-jan-24-2021>

³ Mark 1:15, NRSV.

to experience in heaven one day, but is breaking into our reality, right here and right now. We get glimpses of God's "preferred future for the world"⁴ in the midst of our daily lives—around the communion meal, in beloved community, and when creation is as it was at the beginning—"good."⁵ In Jesus, God is trying a new way of doing the same thing that God has worked for since the beginning—be in right relationship with humanity and guide them to be in right relationship with one another. God's creation is as it was made to be when we love God and neighbor—and you can't fully have one without the other.

Which brings us to the second part of verse 15: "repent."

In Hebrew, there are two verbs that are sometimes rendered as some form of "repent" in English. One is נָחַם (*nacham*), which means "to mourn"—as in to feel sorrow for what you have done wrong.⁶ The other is שׁוּב (*shuv*), which means "to turn back"—as in to change your behavior.⁷

In Greek, the word commonly translated as "repent" in English comes from the verb μετανοέω (*metanoeo*), which means "to think differently."⁸

It really takes all of these words to even get close to the full understanding of the concept of repentance.

Repentance is more than just feeling bad about what you have done and saying "sorry."

⁴ Rolf Jacobson, Working Preacher Podcast

⁵ Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, NRSV.

⁶ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary 5098

⁷ Strong's Hebrew Dictionary 7725

⁸ Strong's Greek Dictionary 3340

Repentance is more than just vowing to never do it again and then doing your best to change your behavior.

Part of the repentance that Jesus calls us to as people of faith is a whole-body experience—it touches our heart (emotions), our body (actions), and our minds (beliefs).

When Jesus calls us to repent, he is inviting us to “wrap [our] mind[s] around” or “have your mind blown by what God is doing.”⁹

We see this happen two-fold in the story of Jonah.

Quick recap, since we get so little of the story in the appointed lectionary reading for today:

- God tells to Jonah to go preach in Nineveh
- Jonah runs the other way and gets on a boat
- A great storm surrounds the boat
- Eventually those on board figures out Jonah is to blame, so they throw him over
- Jonah is swallowed by a large fish and lives in the belly of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights
- There Jonah prays to God, God speaks to the fish, and the fish spews Jonah unto dry land
- *This is where we pick up today:* God tells Jonah a second time to go preach to Nineveh
- Jonah does so (although it sounds pretty halfhearted to me)
- The people repent. The people and the animals fast, wear sackcloth (a sign of mourning and repentance), and cry to God for

⁹ Rolf Jacobson, Working Preacher Podcast

mercy.

- *As our lection this morning concludes:* “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed [God’s] mind about the calamity that [God] had said [God] would bring upon them; and [God] did not do it.”¹⁰
- *But that isn’t the end of the story:* Jonah is furious that God has shown mercy to these people whom Jonah despises. He is so mad that he wants to die. So, God tries to teach him a little more about God and God’s mercy—how it isn’t as choosy as Jonah might have hoped.

As Jonah 3:10 tells us, the people of Nineveh turned (hebrew: shuv) from their evil ways. They changed their behavior. But they are not the only repentance that God is eager for in the story. God also seems to be seeking repentance from Jonah—in the sense of Jonah’s mind being changed, opened, blown, so that he might understand what it truly means that God is “a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”¹¹ And if that is true in regards to Jonah, then the same is true in regards to those whom Jonah hates too. God invites Jonah to wrap his mind around the fact that God loves those whom Jonah does not.

Hopefully the Holy Spirit will work the same in us. May our minds be changed, opened, blown by the immense mercy of God. May we understand that God loves us so much, that God sent God’s only Son that we might be saved, have eternal life, and experience the glory of God’s kin-dom...AND that God did the same for all the rest of humanity as well. Even those who might

¹⁰ Jonah 3:10, NRSV.

¹¹ Jonah 4:2, NRSV.

look down upon, hate, despise, or think less of.

Let us confess our Sin—the ways that we have prioritized other things above God or tried to erect walls between God and our enemies/those we dislike/who look, love, and live different than us.

Let us confess our sins—the ways that we have perpetuated or simply failed to do our part to dismantle systems of racism, white supremacy, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia...*the list goes on*. Let us “have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin” as the twelfth article of the Augsburg Confession titled “Concerning Repentance” says.¹² But let part of our repentance be “at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ.”¹³ May God’s law drive us to our knees, and may God’s gospel (good news) “[comfort] the heart and [put] it at peace”¹⁴ while at the same time penetrate our whole being—our emotions, our actions, and our beliefs—so that our world might reflect a bit better the reality that “God’s [kin-dom] is here.”¹⁵

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.”¹⁶ Amen.

¹² “The Book of Concord” Kolb/Wengert Edition CA XII 4-5

¹³ CA XII 5

¹⁴ CA XII 5-6

¹⁵ Mark 1:15, The Message.

¹⁶ Mark 1:15, NRSV.