

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus proclaims that the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has drawn near. I can't imagine that it looked that way to the folks he called to be disciples – it certainly doesn't look that way to us. But the disciples, when Jesus calls them, give up what they're doing and go with him.

A reading from the book of Jonah is our Old Testament reading this morning. Jonah, the guy we know as having been in the belly of a big fish, or as tradition holds it, in the belly of a whale, has a very different reaction from the disciples to God's call on his life. He runs as fast as he can.

The book of Jonah is one of my favorites in the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. The literary genre is satire. Prophet after prophet in the Hebrew Bible heeds God's call and go to the Israelites, God's chosen people, and God's chosen people may pay attention for a minute, but they soon go back to their unfaithfulness. God's mercy, however, is always present and God returns to the people. God keeps God's promise and God is faithful.

Jonah, however, in contrast to all of the other prophets, runs as fast as he can away from God and God's call to preach repentance. He takes the first boat out of town and a storm ensues. After much deliberation, the crew on the boat throw him overboard to appease Jonah's god of the sea. The seas are calmed and a giant fish swallows Jonah. Jonah bargains with God to get out of the fish and he is spewn on dry land. Jonah relents and goes to the big city of Ninevah, a city that is foreign to the Israelites, and known for its wickedness. Ye God has chosen them for his mercy and forgiveness. It angers Jonah.

What is different about Jonah's message, in addition to it being preached to an audience he does not approve of or like, is that it works. Unlike the prophets who preach to the Israelites, the Ninenvites immediately repent, put on sack cloth, and God's mercy is shown to the people. Jonah is so upset by the success of his preaching to these horrid people that he goes outside, builds a hut for himself and drowns himself in his sorrow. God has pity on him and gives him a tree that springs up overnight and gives Jonah shade, but a worm destroys the tree and Jonah's shade. Jonah is angry enough that he wants to die. God points out that while Jonah may be concerned about the bush, God is concerned about a city of 100,000 people and their animals.

The book of Jonah is a judgement against God's beloved people, people who repeatedly turn away from God. Even strangers recognize the Lord God as worthy of steadfast love and sacrifice. While the prophets of Israel have a hard time with their people, Jonah can go into a foreign land and have success in turning the people toward God.

Consider the disciples in today's Gospel. They are in the midst of working hard, they probably had families – at least we know that two of them had a father, Zebedee. They were living ordinary lives in a place that was occupied by Rome, they themselves were under Roman rule which could be ruthless, and it was expensive because of high taxes. It couldn't have looked like the time was fulfilled or that the Kingdom of God was anywhere near them.

Yet they follow Jesus - immediately. This story has always simultaneously

amazed me and bothered me. Here are some guys fishing, doing what they do every day, and a stranger walks up to them, asks them to leave their vocation, families and homes, and they do. They drop what they're doing, walk away from everything and follow the stranger. The story amazes me, inspires me, and at the same time I'm skeptical. But of course, we're talking about Jesus who is the stranger, and if anyone could inspire someone to leave what they're doing, and their families, it would be Jesus.

Perhaps, also, he gave them hope. Hope that something different could happen in their lives. Hope that there is greater meaning to their lives that they could contribute to. Hope that their faith community could once again be free. Hope that this man Jesus had some answers.

There are two Greek words in this short passage that are important to understand. First, the word used for time is not Chronos but Kairos. Chronos is the minute by minute, day by day accounting of time. Kairos, however, means more like an opportunity, God's time of involvement. God is getting involved – now is the time.

The second Greek word that is important to know is what is meant by fulfilled. Playro means not only fullness but something like totality, completeness, something rendered whole and filled to overflowing.

I imagine that when the disciples hear Jesus say that there is a new opportunity upon them and that it is God's time for involvement in their lives, they are hoping for a lot of things to change. We, too, hope for a lot of things to change. In midst of everything we hope will be different, we are to believe that God is present, active, bringing wholeness to our lives and the life of the world. God's time is now, God is getting involved in making all we know, love and fear complete.

The disciples, like the people of Ninevah, immediately spring into action to answer God's call. We're not told why they do, but could we do the same? Often, we resist God's call in our lives, with excuses or despair – what difference could I possibly make? How can any of this get better? Is this really the word of God for my life or is it something else that I'm hearing? The book of Jonah is just 4 chapters long, and it takes until chapter 3 for Jonah to heed God's call.

The contrast between the two call stories, Jonah's and the disciples', is stark. Immediate cooperation with a call to follow Jesus and another who runs as far away from God as he thinks is possible.

But, the Kingdom of God has drawn near, and the time is fulfilled. God is calling us, all of us, to cooperate with God's love and grace and mercy for this world and every person in this world. We don't have to make grand gestures to save the world – God will do that. But perhaps we can put one foot in front of the other, walk through a door of opportunity that is before us, know that God is with us, and because of that, whatever we do in his name will make a difference we can't fathom.

Amen.