

**Jonah 3:1-5, 10. Context.** The book of Jonah tells the story of an unwilling prophet whom God has sent to proclaim judgment upon Israel's enemies in the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. When Jonah gets his call, he immediately takes off in the opposite direction. He boards a boat at the Mediterranean seaport of Joppa that is bound for the westernmost shores of the sea. But God won't let him get away: he brings a storm upon the sea that the sailors are unable to resist. In a last ditch attempt to avoid God's call, he nearly begs the sailors to throw him into the sea as an offering to appease God and calm the waters, and they oblige him. But even there, Jonah can't get away from God: by means of a large fish – who swallows Jonah – God brings Jonah back to the shore. And so, with this week's reading, the story begins again. A philological note: the Hebrew word for "overthrown" in the reading is related to the word that means "repent." Coincidence? Probably not.

***The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.... When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.***

**Reflection.** Jonah's prophecy is the shortest on record: just one sentence. And the response of the people of Nineveh is unheard of: everyone believes and repents – even the cattle! Throughout the Bible the prophets of God were ignored if not killed by those to whom they were sent. Only after the Ninevites repent do we learn from Jonah why it was that he fled from his call: he knew that if the enemies of God repented, God would not execute divine judgment upon them – an outcome that Jonah couldn't live with. Jonah wanted to see the Ninevites punished for the evils that they had committed against God's people. Can we look at our enemies and see sinners whom God is eager to redeem?

**Psalm 62:5-12. Context.** This week's reading gives voice, not to Jonah so much as to the Ninevites: the psalmist expresses that God is a refuge and a rock, who repays all according to their work. If they repent, no matter who they are, God will deliver them from judgment.

***For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them. Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.***

**Reflection.** "If riches increase, do not set your heart on them." Hmmm. Words to live by.

**1 Corinthians 7:29-31. Context.** Among the Corinthians, Paul's teaching about holiness had raised questions regarding marriage and sexuality. There were some who had begun to question whether or not to marry, or if married, should they abstain from sex? In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul clarifies his position: in God's eyes, marriage is a matter of indifference. That is, God loves us no more or less because of our marital status. Similarly, abstinence is not a particular virtue. And celibacy, which Paul himself exemplified, was of no particular merit, except that it gives one more time to devote to one's calling. This week's reading sums up his rationale: live life like the kingdom were already here, "for the present form of this world is passing away." The "present form" is passing away, together with all its social, familial, political, economic and existential expectations.

***I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.***

**Reflection.** Most of us spend most of our time trying to navigate the ins and outs of daily living. If we're not careful, the status quo can consume all of our attention. With these words, Paul encourages us to see beyond the status quo and to dream, as brother Martin did, of a new world of peace and justice and love – a reflection of God's kingdom that is the goal that drives us even now. If there was one thing that you could change that would loosen the grip of the status quo on your life, what would it be?

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**Mark 1:14-20. Context.** This week's reading gives Mark's account of the beginning of Jesus' preaching and the call of his first disciples, two pairs of brothers, Simon and Andrew, James and John. Like John the baptizer, Jesus preaches repentance but he also preached the good news of God's reign. His first disciples were not rich, but they were not poor. Leaving their former lives behind represented a real reorganization of the material well-being of their families.

***Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.***

**Reflection.** Following Jesus transforms lives. The things that our culture tells us are important – financial prosperity, physical health, a roof over our heads, etc. – aren't even on the radar in the kingdom of God. But these are goals that few of us would deny striving for. And that's the tension we live in if we want to follow Jesus. Imagine yourself a small business owner in ancient Galilee – or in the town where you live today, for that matter – and Jesus walks up to you and says, "Set that all aside, and follow me. I can't promise you more money or security, but I can promise you an intimate relationship with the Creator who loves the entire universe, a relationship more intimate than any you've ever known." Would you follow?