

## Epiphany #3

1-24-2021

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Vicar Karen Pugatch

### Celebrate (Introduction)

“As we continue through the time after Epiphany, stories of the call to discipleship show us the implications of our baptismal calling to show Christ to the world. Jesus begins proclaiming the good news and calling people to repentance right after John the Baptist is arrested for preaching in a similar way. Knowing that John was later executed, we see at the very outset the cost of discipleship. Still, the two sets of brothers leave everything they have known and worked for all their lives to follow Jesus and fish for people.”

We come together in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn: [“Word of God, Come Down on Earth”](#)

### Psalm: 62:5-12

“For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from him.

<sup>6</sup> He only is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

<sup>7</sup> On God rests my deliverance and my honor;  
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

<sup>8</sup> Trust in him at all times, O people;  
pour out your heart before him;  
God is a refuge for us. *Selah*

<sup>9</sup> Men of low estate are but a breath,  
men of high estate are a delusion;  
in the balances they go up;  
they are together lighter than a breath.

<sup>10</sup> Put no confidence in extortion,  
set no vain hopes on robbery;  
if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

<sup>11</sup> Once God has spoken;  
twice have I heard this:

that power belongs to God;

<sup>12</sup> and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love.

For thou dost requite a man  
according to his work.”

”.....

**Hymn of Praise:** [“Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!”](#)

**Prayer of the Day**

“Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.”

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading:** [Jonah 3:1-5,10](#)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading:** [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#)

**The Gospel:** [Mark 1:14-20](#)

**Hymn of the Day:** [“O Jesus I have Promised”](#)

**The Message:** ([Video Link](#))

Today’s first scripture lesson is from the book of Jonah in the Old Testament which tells only a brief story about the all too human prophet, Jonah. The story of this prophet begins with God saying to Jonah, “Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.” It must be noted that Nineveh was one of the largest cities at that time and was the capital of the powerful nation of Assyria.

God’s command made no sense to Jonah. Why should he risk his life by going into a foreign city, no less ultimately an enemy with such a message? Why should he go and be with such wicked people? Therefore, trying to avoid God’s command he decided to go to the much friendlier surroundings of Tarshish, The journey was by water and we all, know the story of what happened. A violent storm threatened the life of the boat and crew. Knowing that this was God’s punishment for Jonah’s going against His command, Jonah jumped overboard in order to save the other innocent boat occupants. The story then tells us that a large fish saved him by swallowing him. For three days he lived in the fish’s belly. During this time Jonah prayed to be saved which was resolved by God forgiving him and had the Fish spew out Jonah upon dry land.

It was then the Lord came to Jonah a second time. “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” This time Jonah thought better and set out for the city. Going into the very heart of the city, Jonah cried out, “Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” The people and the king believed the message of this reluctant and skeptical prophet. “And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.” The king decreed, “All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.” Seeing their repentance, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. Nineveh was spared. Since God did not destroy Nineveh because of their repentance, Jonah was extremely annoyed, especially since God had made Jonah pay the price for this refusal to accept God’s forgiveness of the wicked people of Nineveh. After all Nineveh was the capital of the ultimate enemy of the

Jews. To this God responded, “And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals.”

It must be noted that many Biblical scholars do not view Jonah as literal history but was a story to convey a message. Although Jonah has had many different interpretations the most obvious is that God’s forgiveness extends to all who are repentant. This is even in light of this forgiveness being extended to those we may determine to be our enemy. God’s grace is beyond our human limitations and judgmental thinking. Jonah had difficulty understanding this and was ready to die because his God had saved the wicked city of Nineveh, the enemy. For Jonah there was no longer any hope in this turncoat act of God. Jonah thought he would watch the destruction of this evil city of Nineveh. God had other plans based upon love for a repentant city. Jonah just couldn’t understand this and instead of realizing that God was a God of love for everybody the prophet wished to die.

These past several months we have witnessed the evil results of hatred and the extremism of a deeply divided nation. We may have wished to somehow escape the uncertainty and turmoil. Like Jonah we may have wished to escape it all. But now life may have seemed to change and we may be caught up in a moment of hope for unity and peace. This hope must be accompanied by the realization of repentance and the acceptance of God’s love or we will remain a divided nation embroiled in hate, revenge and injustice.

We see the importance of repentance in that John prepared the way for Jesus by calling for repentance. It is through repentance that we are able to clear our minds and lives of all the negatives which may hinder our acceptance of God’s message through Jesus. Jesus said this before the calling of Simon, Andrew, James, and John,. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news.” This led Jesus to give direction to His disciples and to us. “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” To be able to fish for people is to accept and live the good news of God’s love for all people. When you don’t live this understanding of God’s all-encompassing love and when life may ask us to extend this love to someone we determine not to be worthy, we may seek to run the other direction such as Jonah did.

With all that we are facing as a society it is imperative that we take the call from Jesus seriously – the call to live God’s love for all. We are facing possibly the worst months of this pandemic because many didn’t want to follow guidelines because they believed it infringed upon their freedom. This is what has cause the dramatic increase of deaths. This lack of love for others has not only infringed upon other’s health but denied them life. When the outcome is over 400,000 deaths and countless who will be suffering from long-term effects of the virus, we as a nation must honestly take stock of ourselves and discover the need for repentance.

We are turning a new page in the history of our country and with it must come this honest reflection of who we are in light of the good news of God’s love for all. There is no room for prejudice, hate, and revenge in this love. Our future will be determined by how we treat each

other, listen to each other, respect each other, forgive each other, and yes, love each other. As Christians this is our call. We are to be the living witness to the good news of the gospel. Without this witness the hope which many still have will vanish. We cannot say let someone else do it. We are called to do it.

The first Bible verse that I can remember hearing and learning as a young child is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, "...be kind one to another,,,,," At that early age in life that was all I needed to understand and it has been foremost in my mind throughout my life. That is not to say that I have always lived up to those words because I haven't. But these few words have been with me throughout my life and yes, at times, even haunted me.

In preparing this message I revisited that passage in Ephesians and read the entire context of these treasured words for me. "Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:31-32) These words need to be the preamble of this new page in our nation's history. These words call for all of us to place into perspective all that that divides us and destroys life and each other. This demands we see ourselves as a vital part of life. As a vital part of the life we can either destroy it and ourselves or we can support life by finding ways to live together in unity and peace.

As Jesus call Simon, Andrew, James, and John he continually calls us to be fishers of men, or his disciples in the here and now. To be his disciple is defined in Paul's ending words to my life's reoccurring words, ".../be kind one to another...." "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

The new page of history is now being written. Will we answer the call to help write that page with the understanding and life of love and forgiveness. Will we make the difference and help bring an end to a deeply divided society and nation? The politics of division no longer can rule for that only spells death. The politics of love is life and hope for the future. We cannot afford to be Jonah by running away from or avoiding the problem and wishing the worst for others. Rather we must be hopeful in seeing honest repentance in all who live a life of hate, revenge and destruction,

**Anthem:** ["Lift Every Voice and Sing"](#) Morgan State Choir

**Offering\*:** ([On-Line Giving Link](#))

We give thee but thine own, what e'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

## **The Prayer**

God of all ages, we as a nation are beginning a new page in our history. During this time of extreme diversity open our hearts and minds to overcome clouded mindsets in order to find common ground and unity of purpose. Grant us the wisdom to meet the many difficult challenges we face, - some of our own making and others thrust upon us. Lead us to discern truth from fiction so that we may determine right from wrong. We long to be a people governed by kindness and justice. We pray for your guiding presence throughout all our decisions both personally and as a society.

The deadly pandemic continues to spiral out-of-control. During this time give strength to those who are caring for the sick and dying. May we find ways to more effectively distribute the vaccine which we so desperately need. Give us the perseverance to make the sacrifices in order to help curtail its spreading devastation. May we find ways in helping those who are affected economically.

We pray for all who need your comforting and healing presence especially Bob and Pat Allen, Heidi Brackbill, Parker Brennan, the Elshafei family, Betty Fultz, the Johnson Family, Robert Karner, Donna Mayhew, Bev and Jim Mertz, Wendy Neumann, Elise Oliver, Peter Olsen, David Otto, Dottie Reitz, Robert Reitz, Linda Rigby, Colin Shea, Jerry Shea, Jack Smith, the Spiegler family, Linda Stephens, Yongyin Sun, Esther and Buck Trautwein, Linda Williamson, Pastor Jack, and all those who are suffering pain, and sorrow as a result of this pandemic.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **The Benediction**

The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine upon you;

The Lord lift up His presence upon you and give you peace. Amen

And now my brothers and sisters

Live on knowing God's love,

The joy of living this life of love,

And the peace which only comes through the power of His presence within you.

So live on in Love, Joy, Peace, and Power.

Closing Hymn: ["Lead On O King Eternal"](#)

We are discontinuing in person worship services on Sundays until further notice. The online worship experiences will continue as well as the Midweek Thought.

\*Offering to be sent to:

Bob Brackbill

10274 Raleigh Tavern Road

Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church

9122 Sybert Drive

Columbia Hills

Ellicott City, MD 21043

<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org>

Please note that you now have the opportunity of online giving with the link found after the offering designation or here: [https://tithe.ly/give\\_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291](https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291)