

Notes for Next Sunday

Third Sunday after Epiphany

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Jonah 3:1-5, 10). God is concerned for all people, even those we might write off. The people of Nineveh hardly seem like “good prospects.” However, the message they hear is from God, and God makes sure that it bears the fruit of repentance. Do you assume some people are unable or unwilling to respond to the Gospel? Leave conversion in God’s hands and faithfully fulfill your role as His witness. He has promised that His Word will bear fruit, and He is concerned that all people have the opportunity to be saved. Thank God, His Word bore the fruit of repentance in Nineveh and also in your life.

Epistle (1 Corinthians 7:29-31). Paul now speaks with pastoral affection to the whole church, calling the Corinthians “brothers” (7:29). He reminds them that they live in the last days. “The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:5); their salvation is nearer than when they first believed (Rom 13:11); the days have been shortened (Mt 24:22). Thus they should live with eternity in mind —as people who are always aware they may have to leave this world at any moment. This heightened awareness of our transience has been well illustrated by the analogy to the terminally ill. The person who knows his remaining time is limited has a changed perspective. He sees, hears, and values everything in a new way.

Gospel (Mark 1:14-20). The first thing Jesus does in His public ministry is to call two pairs of brothers. They respond by dropping everything, following Him, and becoming “fishers of men.” The same invitation to discipleship confronts people today: either drop everything and, in faith, follow Jesus and make sacrifices, or run the risk of missing out on the Kingdom. Thankfully, we are not left to our own devices in this regard. God’s Holy Spirit, working through the Word and Sacraments, moves us to faithful discipleship and so also to eternal life.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ²“**Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.**” ³Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. ⁴On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” ⁵The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. ¹⁰When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

3:1 second time. God made a new beginning with Jonah, giving him a second chance. (TLSB)

3:2 proclaim to it the message I give you. God would give Jonah the words to speak against Nineveh, reflecting God’s will rather than Jonah’s. (TLSB)

3:2 obeyed. Jonah had learned his lesson and now followed God’s directions. (TLSB)

3:3 very important city.† See 4:11, which says the city had more than 120,000 inhabitants. Archaeological excavations indicate that the later imperial city of Nineveh was about eight miles around. “Three days” may have been a conventional way of describing a medium-length distance. Or the term may refer to a “preaching circuit” through the city’s gates and plazas. (CSB)

Indicates not Nineveh’s size, but God’s concern for the city. (TLSB)

3:4 be overturned. The message that God told Jonah to deliver may be understood in two ways: Jonah hoped that Nineveh would be overturned in destruction; instead, the city was overturned in repentance and faith. God then overturned His decision for judgment and granted them mercy (v 10). Nineveh changed and God changed His judgment, but Jonah did not. After Jonah delivered God's message, nothing more is heard of him in ch 3. (TLSB)

3:5 fast ... sackcloth ... dust. Nineveh's repentance manifests itself in a form that rivals even the most pious Israelite times of repentance. Not only the king, but all the people and even the livestock put on sackcloth and fast (Jonah 3:5–8). Jonah 3:8 is worded to suggest that just like the people, the livestock too covered themselves with sackcloth! In that way, the Ninevites' penitence exceeds any recorded for Israel. (CC)

3:10 God relented. Whether all the Ninevites of that generation continued in their new faith, we do not know. No doubt many grew careless and allowed their faith to be choked off like the plant in Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13:20ff). At any rate, some 150 years later, in 612 BC, Nineveh was destroyed. Were there any believers left then? We do not know; we can only hope so. (PBC)

EPISTLE – 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

²⁹ What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

7:29 time is short. The time for doing the Lord's work has become increasingly short. Life is fleeting, as times of persecution remind us. Do not be unduly concerned with the affairs of this world (vv. 29–31) because material things are changing and disappearing (v. 31). Some think the reference is to the Lord's second coming. (CSB)

Kairos means not just "time" in general, but "an opportune or favorable period of time," "the right season." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

7:30 who are happy. Mourning is a temporary feature of this present world (Rev. 21:4). Christians experience the pain of separation, but they understand that release from these things is assured. Therefore, they do not grieve as those who have no hope (1 Th 4:13). (TLSB)

7:30 buy something. People engaged in business, occupied in a station which deals exclusively with matters of this world, must not let their hearts be wrapped up in the gain and in the enjoyment of the world, but always keep their eyes directed to the greatest gift and blessing, that of the final consummation of salvation in heaven. As one commentator has it, we have here "the picture of spiritual detachment in the various situations in life." (Kretzmann)

7:30 not theirs to keep. Because of the temporary nature of all things in this world, we do not really "own" any earthly thing in an ultimate or lasting sense. Therefore, we are to regard such things in the proper way; that is, as stewards of God's gifts and resources. . (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 7, Part 1)

1 Timothy 6:7 "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it."

7:31 present form. Everything will be dissolved to make way for the new heavens and new earth (2 Pt 3:13). (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” ¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” ¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. ²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

1:15 is near. The kingdom of God has drawn near, meaning that the Kingdom of God is present in its fulfillment in the person, Word and work of Jesus.

1:15 repent and believe. Echoes John’s call for a public show of contrition and an adoption of a new way of life (cf vv 2–4). (TLSB)

1:16 Sea of Galilee. Galilee was home for most of the disciples and also for the majority of the first Christians. Galilee, even though also under the control of Herod who imprisoned John the Baptist, was nevertheless very open to non-Jewish influence. When opposition surfaced in Jerusalem, Jesus moved the thrust of his ministry to Galilee. Much remained to be done and to be taught before the disciples would be prepared for Jesus’ passion. (PBC)

1:17 Come, follow me. Jesus’ practice contrasts sharply with that of other rabbis, who were chosen by those who wanted to follow their teaching. Jesus, however, chose those whom He wished to follow Him. (TLSB)

1:17 fishers of men. Like fishermen, then, Jesus’ disciples were likewise expected to draw others into the Kingdom. (TLSB)

1:18 at once...followed him. Emphasizes the disciples’ unquestioning response to Jesus’ call. Given that the promises of God’s kingdom were being fulfilled (v 15), one might expect all people to respond to Jesus’ invitation as did Peter and Andrew. (TLSB)

1:19 gone a little farther. Evidently he walked up the shore a short way. Simon and Andrew were walking with him.

1:19 James ... John. Brothers later dubbed “Sons of Thunder” by Jesus (3:17). Along with Peter, they formed something of an inner circle among the 12 apostles (cf 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). (TLSB)

1:20 left their father...with hired men. James and John’s fishing business was large enough that it supported laborers from outside the family. Walking away from this business, therefore, meant leaving a successful trade and a relatively secure future. (TLSB)