

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Amen.

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ.

I love that the opening of today's collect is paired with the story of Jonah.

Jonah did anything but answer readily the call of God. God has been persistent with Jonah, as God often is when God calls us; we meet Jonah in today's reading when Jonah has already tried to flee God's call to the farthest destination he can find; God creates a tempest on the sea, Jonah ends up in the belly of a fish; and there, Jonah sings a psalm of praise and thanksgiving to his God who Jonah knows hears prayers and saves. Jonah is spit out by the fish onto dry land, and his persistent God calls Jonah again to send him on a mission to the Gentile city of Nineveh as God intended.

Last Sunday, our readings were about recognising the voice of God when God calls; the young boy Samuel had to learn to recognise God calling his name; and Nathanael had to learn to recognise God in the person of Jesus.

This Sunday's readings are about what we do AFTER we've recognised God calling us. This Sunday's readings are about being *sent*; these

readings are about what we are willing to risk and to lose when we *answer* God's call.

Jonah, after hearing God's call, runs away. I don't really blame him; imagine the task before him, one human being walking into this huge city and crying out against it, shouting about the people's wickedness, and declaring its destruction. Jonah might well be severely outnumbered by people who find him less than likeable. The wonderful psalm that Jonah sings from the belly of the fish, is a psalm praising God as a God of deliverance, a God who hears the cry of those brought low, and a God who embraces with care those who recognise their broken relationship with God; and ironically, it is these same attributes of God that Jonah will come to resent when he accomplishes the mission on which God sends him. Jonah, before he ran away, recognised God's mercy and incredible capacity for forgiveness; and Jonah did not want to look like a fool for walking through the streets of this city declaring its destruction only to have nothing at all happen to its people. Jonah was unwilling to risk and lose his ego in the service of God. Jonah was unwilling to see the mercy God extended to him extended to others. Jonah's ego judged the people of

Nineveh as unworthy of God's grace, and Jonah became resentful and angry at the expansiveness of God's embrace.

In our Gospel, we have Jesus beginning his ministry by picking up where John the Baptist left off; Jesus is willing to risk and to lose even his own life. We also have the calling of Peter and Andrew, James and John to be disciples of Jesus. They are risking the loss of their livelihoods, and maybe, for James and John, the esteem of their father, whom they leave behind with only the hired hands to work with him. Later on, we see that, like Jonah, they will be called by God to actually risk losing their ego. In the tenth chapter of Mark, James and John turn to Jesus and say, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' They ask for power and for glory; Jesus tells them that they don't really know what they are asking, and that they will drink the same cup of pain and sacrifice that he will. James and John don't yet see that they must lose their ego if they are to share In Jesus' glory.

And so it is with us. God calls us each by name to take part in the ministry of the baptised faithful; and we are presented throughout our lives with many missions. That is we are sent for different purposes in different

places at different times. The founding abbess of my religious order once said that the most difficult thing for us as disciples of Jesus called to ministry is to remember that the mission and ministry is not about us. God tells Jonah that the mission to which he is called is not about how Jonah is esteemed in the eyes of others, or about Jonah's judgmental view of his fellow human beings. Jonah's mission is, says God, about all of those who are confused and searching, who are in need of knowing God's mercy, grace, and love for them, even to the least. James and John think their mission is about power, and they want to be at the top; Jesus will teach them that their mission is about the broken, the sick in mind, heart and body; and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice, even to the least.

James and John tell Jesus that they want him to do for them whatever they ask; Jonah, too, weighs his mission on what he will get out of it, and decides it's not worth trying. God tells us that this egocentric way of thinking is not thinking with the mind of God; Jesus tells us that taking up his ministry and accepting the missions on which we are sent with our minds on what we might get out of it, is not thinking with the mind of Christ.

“Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” God asks Jonah. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd,” Matthew writes of Jesus. We may fear and avoid the risk of losing our ego; but remember, God’s grace and loving care is without limit and unavoidable; when we seek first the will of God we may not get what we want out of it, but we will be made whole, being brought into deeper communion with God and our community.

Then let our minds and our spirits be at one with God’s mind and spirit; let our lives be at one with the life of Christ; then the many missions on which we are sent as the baptised faithful will be about the God who hears, heals, and renews, and not about our own fallible egos. When we surrender our will to the will of God, it may not make our lives easier; but we will find ourselves enfolded by the same blessings of healing and renewal and upheld by God’s unfathomable grace. Amen.