

## "RSVP"

Third Sunday after Epiphany – Lectionary 3  
8:30 and 10:45 a.m. Sunday, January 22, 2012  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; I Corinthians 7:29-31;  
Mark 1:14-20

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You'd probably call me a cautious person. For example, I'm careful in my driving habits. I could be a little more aggressive in pulling out into traffic, but I'm not. I usually wait for a bit more space to open up.

In general, I tend to want to think about things before I make a decision. I might have a gut reaction, might even share that gut reaction, but I prefer time to roll things around inside of me before I give my final answer. You know, weigh the pros and cons. Consider my options. Call one of my lifelines and ask their opinion.

And I'm not one to switch gears quickly. If I'm in the middle of one task, it's sometimes difficult for me to change abruptly to another task. Although I have found that as a parent you have to do so. As I wrestled with this sermon earlier in the week, I got THE PHONE CALL from one of my kids. You know, the "Mom, I'm sorry but I forgot to bring (fill in the blank) to school. I need it before 2<sup>nd</sup> period" phone call. And I drop everything, rush down to the school (driving in my usual safe pattern, so "rush" is a relative term here) and bring the said item to the school office. Now, why I had to rush down to the high school on Wednesday to bring Matthew his Latin V workbook **plus a Santa hat** is beyond me—you can ask **him**—but I dropped everything, including this sermon, to respond to that request. (Maybe I do it because I love it when the child responds back, "Thanks, Mom, you're the greatest!" Music to my ears!)

But beyond that necessary-though-slightly-annoying-parental-gear-switching, I must say I'm not one to drop everything at a moment's notice. So it does amaze me to read the call stories of Jesus to his first disciples, and I always wonder to myself what my response would have been had I been in the shoes of Simon and Andrew, James and John when Jesus called to them. Do you ever wonder that about yourself? What your response would have been had you been in the shoes of Simon and Andrew, James and John?

Ahhh, but we **are** in their shoes. Mark tells his church this story from Jesus' ministry precisely to remind us that Jesus is still calling us to follow. And while this may not mean we should throw all caution to the wind, it is a call to drop at the very least our selfish interests, and take on Jesus' interests, lean on him, listen to him, obey him. From the moment our feet hit the floor in the morning to the moment our heads hit the pillow at day's end, you and I are in the first disciples' shoes. Whether we claim to follow Jesus, or earnestly desire to follow Jesus, or simply are here because we are remotely curious about Jesus, you and I are being called by him all the time. Jesus says

the kingdom of God has come near in him, and he calls us to join him in that kingdom. It's not just a call to do this particular task or that particular activity. It's a call to a whole new way of being in our world so God's kingdom can be seen and experienced by others through us.

Of course, that whole new way of being **is** to be lived out in the particular. That's where things get a bit dicey. Wouldn't it be great if we would pick and choose the particular activities where we would follow Jesus? Naturally we'd choose the easy tasks—the ones where there's no problem dropping everything for them. For example, I can love my neighbors. I love to love my neighbors...at least the ones on Lincoln Street near my home. But love my neighbors at Dauphin County Prison? That's complicated. And aren't you more than willing to treat with kindness and give the shirt off your back to your co-worker who is just a peach of a person to work with? But that other co-worker who is snarky, whose attitude stinks, and who could care less about your well-being—why should you treat them with kindness? And aren't we generous, filling the coffers of many a worthy charity? It's not difficult to contribute to the Salvation Army bucket. But to actually take on the task of changing the way we “do” our economy, how we distribute our resources in the first place, how we think about money, so that a Salvation Army bucket would at last be unnecessary for all families to have food on the table—well, that requires monumental effort on our part, and significant change in the way we even approach the pieces of our economic pie.

Except we're not here to pick and choose. Jesus says, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” Apparently that means even the snarky ones.

Still, our cautious first instinct might be to say, “Let me think about it for awhile. Weigh the pros and cons. Consider my options. I'll get back to you, Jesus.”

But for some reason that Mark doesn't explain, Simon and Andrew, James and John don't say “Let me think about it. I'll get back to you.” Instead, Mark describes an immediate forward response from them toward Jesus. And it never fails to amaze me.

Those disciples were no better, no smarter, no more consistently faithful than you and I are. In the months to come while following Jesus, they regularly messed things up, and Jesus would have to set the situation—and the disciples—straight. At least we know the end of the story, but they had no idea what lay ahead, didn't know Jesus would be arrested and humiliated and executed, didn't foresee the danger they themselves might be in, didn't think there would be something like a resurrection. Talk about naïveté. What in the world would make them drop everything and take on a new way of being in that world?

It must have been less about them, and more about Jesus. It must have been something about him. And so it must have been the sheer power of his love that brought about such a response. What other explanation can there be? For what could prompt someone to let go of the things they've grasped tightly for so long, but a love in which they now feel more safe, more understood, more cared for, more hopeful, more alive than ever before? Jesuit Priest Gregory Boyle says, “**There is no force in the world better able to alter anything from its course than love.**” Now those disciples had yet to comprehend the fullness of that love. Not until Jesus hung on the cross for them (and for the world), and not until God raised Jesus from the dead for

them (and for the world), would those disciples even begin to fathom his love. But right there, from that first call to them by their fishing nets, Jesus' love had been drawing them into **his** net, and then preparing them to do the same for others. No, they could not pick and choose their tasks, but were sent to bring good news to the poor and the outcast, the unimportant and unlovable. They were sent to invite everyone to have a share of the kingdom, and know real life.

Not much in that call has changed in 2,000 years. Nor has our response changed much. We the Church are still messing things up some days, so much so that we will have to rely on Jesus to set the situation—and us, his disciples—straight. The message of love and mercy we've been called to bring sometimes gets a little twisted in our telling. But thanks to Mark and the brevity of his words for making it clear once more and reminding us precisely what the good news is. For reminding us we have been called. For reminding us a response is required.

**AMEN.**

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