

Ser21-4 "God Finds us in the Dark" ...tucc 1-24-21
Jonah 3:1-5 & Mark 1:14-20

Since we claim with such vigor and certainty that God is Still Speaking...even in the darkness, then we might indeed ask the question: Does God have something special and different to say to us in the dark? Since we believe that God finds us in the dark we can believe that God finds Jonah in the dark of the whale's belly.

Jonah in our Hebrew lesson this morning isn't trying to get rid of God; no, Jonah, is trying to run away from God; in the process he almost loses himself—and in the belly of the whale. But it is God who exclaims in loud voice: "Where is Jonah?" God persisted in calling Jonah to a ministry in corrupt old Nineveh.

Our theme for today seems a bit audacious – if not a risky task – that is to seek to find God in the Darkness of lives. Did you hear verse 10 in Jonah's story? When God sees that the people of Nineveh are turning away from their evil ways to God's ways, God changes God's mind about destroying the city. I would suggest that in this story we get a glimpse of what God's coming kingdom looks like: a place of peace and love where people work for the common good of all – all right out in the open of God's light. Furthermore, I suggest that seeing a little of God's kingdom gives us some idea of what's in God's mind for the world – for us.

In our gospel lesson, we have another calling story: Jesus calling for disciples to help him carry out his ministry of good news and help bring in God's kingdom. Jesus comes to Galilee to share the good news – the good news of God. this good news that sheds light on God's call to us.

These questions: Where's God? What's God calling us to do? What's God calling Trinity church to do and be? How do I experience God's still speaking voice? In some ways these questions have to do with Who God is for us.

Mary Oliver, one of my favorite poets, asks this question in one of her poems? ***What is there beyond knowing—beyond and within the dark-- that keeps calling to me? I can't turn in any direction but it's there. I don't mean the leaves' grip and shine or even the thrush's silk song, but the far-off fires, for example, of the stars, heaven's slowly turning theater of light, or the wind playful with its breath.*** -- I don't know about you, but it's that way with me. I can relate. I want to know; I need to know clearly and sometimes exactly what God wants me to do each day. It's that way for us in our jobs. We want to be clear about our supervisor's expectations of us – in concrete terms. In school, we want to know exactly

what the teacher wants or expects in a project. Tell us what you want us to do. Tell us how to deal with the challenges of our lives...

But in the mystery of our spiritual lives, in our journey with the Lord, it's just not that way. Listen to more of Mary Oliver's poem: **"What I know I could put in a pack as if it were bread and cheese, and carry it on one shoulder – important and honorable, but so small.!"** Then Oliver says, **"how wonderful it is to follow a thought quietly to its logical end. But mostly I just stand in the dark field, in the middle of the world, breathing in and out."**

Simon and his brother Andrew and then later James and John are sort of standing out in a dark field, as it were, in the middle of their fishing boats breathing in and out. Their world was fishing and selling fish, cleaning their boats and nets, and counting their money. Over and over – that was their daily routine.

But then Jesus enters their world and says something that causes them to drop their nets and leave their boats and families behind. He says, **"follow me and I will make you fish for people."** That just wouldn't have been enough for me or most folks, right? I would have wanted to know more about what was on Jesus' mind. More about what I was getting into. What's gonna happen to my fishing business and to the people I employ and serve. And once we catch these people, you're teaching us to fish for, what are going to do with them?

We'd like to know more about this story. There must be more to it than that. What makes these men so ready, so willing to join this movement? It's almost like they're sailing in the dark, without the aid of the stars of a compass. But willing to live in the dark for at least a while til Jesus' invitation turns into a lit-up agenda. They are willing to take the risks, the uncertainties ahead. What made them leave their families? We want to think they maybe knew more about Jesus than what Mark tells us. Maybe they had some advanced information that gave them reason to trust him in this new business venture. But we don't know more – not from Mark's gospel this morning. This story of Mark sort of startles me every time I read it. It's so quick. There's an invitation -- a command -- and a response. That's it. It really is like trying to learn how to walk in the dark.

Well, perhaps we need not try to explain this anymore than that. Perhaps that's all there is to the story: invitation – call – response. Perhaps this call from Jesus is so compelling and powerful that these four would-be disciples have to respond...compelled to take the next steps toward their limited understanding of what they will do with Jesus.

Amanda Gorman, new national Poet Laurette, just 22 years old, knows something of the tension we live in between light and dark. She read her original poem, "The Hill We Climb," at the presidential inauguration this past Wednesday. She wrote this poem in the period of the last several weeks. In opening lines, Gorman asks this question: *"When Day comes, Where can we find light in this never ending shade?" The loss we carry, a sea we must wade. We've braved the belly of the beast.* I wonder if she is remembering Jonah in the whale?? And she declares, *"and yet, the dawn is ours before we knew it. Somehow, we do it. Somehow we weathered and witnessed a nation that isn't broken but simply unfinished."*

To pause a moment: Isn't this the way it is with our lives...at times seems broken and really we're just unfinished. Gorman confirms this idea: *"The new dawn blooms as we free it for there is always light – if only we are brave enough to see it – if only we are brave enough to be it."*

Indeed, brave enough to be the light for the world around us....for our own lives.

"We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president, only to find herself reciting for one." Maybe the disciples felt something like this young poet. Bedazzled...by the mystery.

Jesus calls his disciples to get up from what they were doing and to follow him. God call Jonah to get up from what he was doing and go to Nineveh and bring the people back to God. Jesus promised the disciples new life. God offered Jonah hope for a whole people. My friends, this is our promise too. This is our story too. The promise is adventure, surprise, challenge and life, light. Life in the coming kingdom of God --- a life of love and grace and joy.

May it be so in your lives and in mine. Amen.