

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Year B

RCL

- [Jonah 3:1-5, 10](#)
- [1 Corinthians 7:29-31](#)
- [Mark 1:14-20](#)
- [Psalm 62:6-14](#)

Theodore the cat was a special cat. He was a grey tabby, with patches of white on his torso and face. His age, somewhere around 18 years, did not stop him as he prowled the outdoors, bringing us lots of presents, returning for cuddles when he finished with his adventures. One night, 6 years ago, Alan and I were relaxing in the living room when Theodore let out the most horrifying yell. He collapsed in the hallway. His back legs limp as he flailed in pain. We immediately took him to the emergency vet. The vet gave us bad news. He suspected Theo threw a blood clot. He was paralyzed from the chest down and most likely wouldn't recover. This was any furbaby parent's worst nightmare. So we prayed and discussed all the options. And chose to release him from his pain. Alan went out to desk and paid for the service. The vet gave us some time to be with him. When the vet came back, I said, "Can we put him on the ground, just see if he'll walk." The vet looked at me, and obliged, but the look in his eyes told me my hope and optimism was in vain. We put him on the floor. And, he walked.

And walked. And walked, rubbing against all our legs. The vet replied, "Uh, I am not comfortable proceeding ahead."

And Jesus said to his followers, believe in the good news! This moment with Theo was totally unbelievable. And in fact, in a light-hearted moment, the receptionist didn't even know how to refund our money because something like this had never happened before.

Jesus' coming, God's indwelling among us, had never happened before. How could we possibly repent and believe in something so radical? So beyond our understanding. So totally different than what we had ever known? How could we risk our livelihoods, our families, our friends, to believe in something that sometimes we can't even put into words?

What do you believe in? What truths do you center your daily living around? Do your hearts and minds and souls truly and utterly believe in the good news? Or do you set other things above it? We believe in far lesser things about God, others, and ourselves, and we name them as truth and give them immense power. Lies masquerading as truths like- If I act a certain way people will like me. Or I lose this last 5 lbs I'll be beautiful. Or if I do this, this, this, and oh for good measure, this, I will finally be enough. Those things are not the good news. They are not good enough for God. And they are not good enough for us.

We can believe because Jesus has shown us the way. The Good News has never failed us. Even in the midst of horrific tragedy, deep questioning, sorrowful loss, God's love is steadfast. Like a powerful piece art, God is constantly revealing Godself to us, and how in love God is with us. Think about the word Belief as more than just an intellectual concept but rather- Faith- as- a – verb (John Petty). Believing in the Good News does not mean that one is unrealistic or Pollyannaish. Death exists in our time. To not name it would be naïve. BUT, believing in the Good News means we refuse to let it overtake us. Just as Jesus came and conquered death, God will not let death conquer us. When I think to that harrowing night with Theo, I still to this day can't believe the good news that came from it. And yet, Jesus showed me I have every reason to believe, for when he laid in death in the darkest corners of the tomb, the heaviest of stones rolled over, with absolutely no signs of life, he still burst forth in resurrection.

In Jesus' words today, I think we forget his message is in two equally important parts. The first, is the act of repentance. Changing and moving away from something. The second is belief in the Good News. Because we don't turn away from something mindlessly to nothing, we turn toward something else intentionally. Sometimes though we focus too much on the repentance part- beating ourselves up- remembering our mistakes- shaming ourselves. Yet when we've turned from those spiritual, physical, and emotional untruths, we can turn to something more. And, we can let

those things go. Release them. Give them to God. God is already holding our pain anyway, so why not listen to Jesus calling out to us and immediately let them go. Just as the disciples heard the call and immediately left their nets. Immediately isn't just a word that Mark uses over and over again, but something we can act into- and find peace. One can't fully repent, turn away, if we're looking back- focusing on what was. Remember Lot's wife?

It's never that easy though- what's the old adage? It takes 5 positive comments to wash out 1 negative one. The human tendency is to recall negative moments more so than positive. So how do we repent and believe? The answer to this question, and this is my eternal sermon- we don't repent alone, we don't believe alone, we don't let go of anything alone, we don't leave our nets alone, I could go on and on. Look around you. My parents and I were talking about how thrilled we were about this exhibit. We were then talking about my sermon and my mom says, "oh honey, I know your sermon will be great, but because of the Icons in Transformation, no one will be paying attention to you anyway. And that's ok. Soak this all up- it's only here for a short time! We reflected at the opening gala how much we're surrounded, enfolded, how this exhibit inhabits the space and us. This exhibit digs into the spirituality and divine power of icons and brings them to us in a context in which we rarely see.

How many pieces do you think are on our parish campus? (100). 100 ways for turn to God, to release ideas about God and ourselves that no longer serve us, that aren't true. 100 ways for us to be present in the here and now. Watch. Notice how God inhabit us in a powerful and loving way. There will always be memories of the past- good and bad. Instead of taking on belief as a new task, let it embody you and live into it as a new identity, as God became embodied, and become new in Christ. Let the good news embody you every day. Hear Jesus say to you- Change your life. "Believe in the Good News. Come with me."