

3 Epiphany B 2021

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Psalm 62:6-14

Mark 1:14-20

Here is some good news:
On a cold windy day in Washington,
Our lives changed.

Our lives changed
Because whoever we are –
And we are all different –
we saw signs of a new future,
And believed we could set out in a new direction.

Last week at the inauguration
We saw a field of flags,
Red, white, blue,
And rainbow,
beautiful, snapping in the stiff breeze.
We heard a diva belt out old words
That once seemed tired,
But now have new meaning.
We saw a strong Black woman
Take an oath of office.
We heard the words of man
Who, however fallible he may be,
believes in goodness, and trusts the truth.
We heard our new president pledge to do his utmost to lead us.

And then the very young poet
Stepped into our midst
And showed us what can be.

Everything about that moment was captivating,
from the bright red and yellow
to the dancing hands,
to the torrent of honest, hopeful, hip-hopping words.
She stole the show.

More than President Biden's address,
More even than Lady Gaga's anthem,
Amanda Gorman stopped us in our tracks,
And offered us a vision
Of who we would and could,
Yes, and should be.

“Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true,”
She proclaimed.
“Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.
That even as we grieved, we grew.
That even as we hurt, we hoped.
That even as we tired, we tried.”

In that show-stopping moment,
Millions of us,
And millions around the globe,
Believed that the future could be good.
If we turn around and see it,
Believe in it,
Work for it,
There is a future with more hope.

“The new dawn balloons as we free it,”
She told us.
“There is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it.
If only we are brave enough to be it.”*

Poets and prophets
Speak a true and lively word
A word that can call us to repentance,
That can turn us around.

Poetry and prophecy
Stop the show,
Offer a reset,
And give us something to take with us
When we turn around and follow the future.

We saw that last week,
When the rule of law prevailed
And poetry lifted our hearts.
And perhaps, with lightened spirits,
we can remember and see it again
In the stories of our faith.

Poetry and prophecy are show-stoppers.
Aha moments.
Calls to come to awareness,
Turn around,
And start up again.

It was true – against all odds – in ancient Ninevah
When the prophet Jonah spoke.
It was true beside the sea of Galilee
When Jesus called his first disciples.
And it's true now,
At least for this moment.

Look at Jonah.
Until Jesus came along
Jonah – of all people –
Was the most effective prophet
In the history of the world.

He delivered a message from God;
It was simple, clear,
And apparently utterly compelling.
Not, in his case, poetic, at all.
But compelling.

The people of the great city
Where he had been sent
Believed the message,
And changed their ways,
And that changed the course of their lives.

Jonah, like Jesus,
Brought those around him
Into life-changing relationship with God.

Like Jesus,
And not like Jesus.
Jonah wasn't poetic, he was plodding.
But he got the job done.
He delivered his message
In simple, clear language,
Language you might be tempted
To say that was completely uninspired.
And yet, it worked.

People listened,
And acted on what they heard,
And God gave them life.
Amazing.

Jonah was a pouter,
Resentful and sullen –

But effective.
A show-stopper, in fact.

Jesus is a show-stopper too.
And utterly different
From all the prophets and poets
Who had gone before.
Where Jonah was grumpy,
Jesus was humorous;
Where Jonah was resentful and fearful,
Jesus was free and fearless.

And –
his message was simple, clear,
And, apparently,
Utterly compelling.

Believe in the good news;
God's kingdom is here, now.
Follow.
Bring others with you.

And it worked.

We know it worked,
Because here we are,
Listening to his words.

Listening to the words of hope,
And wondering how to act on what we hear.

As God called Jonah –
Unlikely as he was;
As God called Jesus –
In whose likeness we are made,
So God calls each of us.

We didn't ask to live in a fearful time;
No one does.
But here we are.

Can we hear the words of the poets and prophets,
Change direction,
And start a new way of living?
What do these times require of us?

Jesus called his first disciples
To a new life.
Just as he calls us.

He calls each of us to turn around,
Follow,
And as we go,
Invite others to join us on the way of hope.
That way looks different for each of us.
God calls us as we are, and asks for our best gifts,
To make us effective and compelling
In sharing the show-stopping message of hope.

That message goes beyond the moment,
Though we live it in the moment.
We are called to be disciples now,
Embedded in the events of now.
Embedded in the events of now,
But looking beyond them for the source of hope.

For us,
Only the way of Jesus is the way of hope.
There is no message embedded in the now
That can sustain us forever.
Already the sparkle of the inauguration moment is fading.
Partisan wrangling has begun all over again.
The virus continues to rage.

No fluttering flags,
No soaring words,
No oaths of office
Can change the future.

They help us breathe again,
They warm our hearts,
They calm our minds,
And give us fresh courage.
But they cannot save us.

Yes, the fluttering flags,
And the soaring words,
And the oaths of office
Are show-stoppers,
Aha moments,
Invitations to keep going.

But only the call of Jesus,
Over the tumult,
Can give us hope that does not fail,
Courage that stands firm,
Compassion that overrides contempt.

The inauguration moment is already fading.
We can hope for good,
Actively seek the good,
Commit to action,
To speaking truth,
To reckoning with justice,
And only then,
To becoming a people of reconciliation and peace.

For us,
Jesus is the one who will guide us on the way.
Without him,
Without his clear, compelling call,
Without his invitation
We will grow weary on the way.

We are his disciples first,
And it is as his disciples
That we discover how we will act
In the times we have been given.

He is calling us.
It may sound sudden and scary
To answer the call immediately,
As the gospel says.
But consider the times.
And, finally, remember this –
In the kingdom,
Immediately is always.
Now or soon,
He will come walking by
With a show-stopping, aha moment,
Offering me, and you, all of us,
Another chance to turn around and follow.
And we'll be ready to answer,
Immediately.

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ055iIliN4>