

Epiphany 3B

January 25, 2015

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Jonah 3:1-5,10

Reluctant, but finally consented to go; God was about to act.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

The appointed time has grown short.

Mark 1:14-20

Jesus announces, "The time has come"; says, "Follow me."

There is a thick air of excitement that fills this story of four fishermen dropping their nets and leaving their boats and their jobs, in response to Jesus inviting them to follow him. Jesus does not tell them to repent or to believe. Jesus never asks if they love him (except Peter); or if they will worship him; or if they will lay down their lives for him. Jesus simply tells them to follow him – and they do. There were no IQ tests, or personality profile assessments, or evangelical leanings that qualified them to be disciples. They were invited 'as is'. Whatever gifts they would need would be given. Whatever empowering they would need would happen.

In our Epistle reading today, Paul told the Corinthians – or really, admonished them - not to wait for Christ's return to live their new life as Kingdom of God people. God's Kingdom is already here, because Christ is in them – and so they should conduct their lives accordingly NOW. The same admonition applies to us today. Our world badly needs to change. Most of us do not live each day as if the Second Coming was going to happen tomorrow. But, in fact, the point Paul was making is that we need to live each day as if the new world – the Kingdom of God – is here, is already being born in our midst.

For these four fishermen, it was not about some philosophical argument that might challenge their concept of who God is. What drew them was a personal invitation to follow Jesus: It was a call to DO something.

This concept of accepting Jesus' invitation – not demanding an instantaneous conversion, but inviting action, carries a deep message I want to explore with you. I thought about the air of excitement and engagement that has fed us in this faith community. We lived out our passion of putting programs in place that would qualify us to become a parish church. It took us about four years of work, and we did it. We dreamed a BHAG dream of having a school here again, after more than a decade of St Stephen's Episcopal School having moved off site. It took the focused, hard work of getting licenses, making physical changes to the building, getting loans, hiring people, and we did it. Our hearts were pierced by the stories of the Lost Boys of the Sudan, but even more, I think, by the plight of the family left in Sudan, whom we got to hear about through our friends from South Sudan. Carol Pecora's ministry became reality, sponsorships were created, sponsors were found, relationships were built, videos of healthy and bright children were shared with us, and we did it.

The 'doing' of things like this requires a willingness to change priorities in life, to choose differently, to think differently, to live that new life we are called into. This is about us choosing to participate, not only in a belief system, but to participate in making things happen. So our faith journey is not a consumer model; it is more about being partners in a start-up company.

Think about Apple Computer. When I came to California in 1981, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak had recently left HP. They wanted HP to build a personal computer, but HP refused. So they left HP to fulfill their dream. What has been created is a series of exciting products that

change the way we work and the way we manage our lives; the PC, laptop, iPod / iTunes, digital on-line music, iPhone – lots more than a phone; a handheld PC and daytimer and phone, and next will come an Apple Watch, I guess.

What we do as church is not only our sitting in pews sharing worship, but it is also about jumping on opportunities to keep us moving and motivated to live our new life in Christ.

There is a rarified atmosphere in the church office that I would pray that every one of us could carry into our day.

We welcome a new preschool family who visits and decides to enroll their child into our care.

A homeless person comes, asking for help to buy food.

A woman calls, asking for money to pay an electric bill.

Brian Nordwick writes to me, asking if some men here would come with me to a Promise Keepers meeting in Fresno during the Summer.

Bruce Bramlett and Mary Morrison offer to come preach here.

John and Stephanie just show up with tools, park their pickup truck on the sidewalk along Santa Teresa Blvd, and start re-building the cross in the hillside.

Nine people come with gloves, rakes, and pitch forks, to transform our community garden jungle into a clean, attractive entrance to our facility.

That was Friday and Saturday this past week.

Our invitation from Jesus Christ is to reject the decision of the would-be disciple who was invited by him, but said he first had family obligations to bury his father. (Mt 8:22). Our challenge is to reject the decision of the would-be disciple who was a rich man seeking eternal life, but who could not follow Jesus by selling what he had and giving it to the poor. (Mk 10:17-22). Our challenge is to live the Kingdom of God NOW; accept the invitation; be willing to live a new life looking for chances to fish for people.

I love our liturgical worship; I love traditional hymns; I also love building programs and making changes and getting excited over doing things that change lives and that give people the taste of life in God's world.

Jesus wants us to follow him 'as is'. Whatever gifts we need will be given, as they have been; whatever empowering we need will happen, as it has happened. Our faith decision is a call to follow, to act, to move, to change, to build, to experiment, and to grow into complete reliance on God to bless what we do. What an invitation this is before an Annual Meeting that sets the stage for our fellowship, worship, discipleship, ministry and mission for the coming year. Are you ready? Let's Go! Look out 2015!!