

## St. Mark 1:14-20

The account of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection help us to understand His "making fishers of men." It also helps us to understand the historical account of Jonah. In turn, understanding Jonah sheds light on the mending of the nets in the gospel. The central thought is the sea, the fish, and the fishermen. Jonah is told by God to go to the people of Nineveh and he is to preach to them in order that they may repent.

Jonah, not caring for the people of Nineveh and desiring to see them perish, went in the opposite direction and caught the next boat out of there. Jonah sleeps in the belly of the boat in peace while turmoil and chaos ensues on deck and in the sea. The end of the sailor's story comes as they throw Jonah overboard and into the sea in order to calm the chaotic and abysmal waters.

Represented in between the lines is judgment for Jonah for not doing what he was called to do: to preach God's word. Being cast into the sea was like being cast into the depths of Sheol. But God, in His mercy, teaches us many things in the account as He also teaches Jonah. Jonah is in the belly of a great fish and in his great suffering, prays to God from the belly of the fish and says, "I cried by reason of my affliction to the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell I cried, and you heard my voice"(Jonah 2:2).

Jonah's prayer goes on to confess that to be in the sea is to be out of God's sight...a most horrible condition. The sea represents hell, and Jonah suffered it because of his refusal to hear God's word in his life. We, too, must take heed to this very danger. It is all too easy for us to set aside God's word for the sake of what we desire. Jonah is two images in one account for us. Jonah stands as a warning. To think of the fishermen in the gospel, we consider that it must have been refreshing, humbling, and intriguing to have the God of heaven come and say, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

To begin the journey with Christ has a different feel than the long, sustained travel on a journey. The gospel comes to us and our hearts are cheered. But, the long travel presents difficulties and challenges. It is in the difficulties where we find our greatest struggle. Jesus warns us about this in St. John 5:14, "Behold, you are healed: sin no more, lest a worse thing come to you." The apostle Peter, that man who was mending his nets, knows this very well and he adds comment: "For if after they have escaped the pollution of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and they are again entangled, and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning"(2 Peter 2:20).

It is the sustained journey, as with Jonah, that becomes difficult. We live life, and we become entangled in difficult situations that threaten to compromise our Christian faith and life. We, then, look at God's doctrines merely as nice ideas and good suggestions, but we fail to cling to God's teaching when we encounter life situations. But God's word is clear. Jonah learns this. Peter, Andrew, James, and John would come to learn the same thing but in different situations.

You must be careful not to set aside God's doctrines. To do so means certain death. To conclude that you can sin because Jesus is merciful will lead you into a worse state than you were in before you were brought to Christ. You must take heed to the first image we see in Jonah--our end due to sin--to be cast into the tempestual and abysmal sea that is hell.

The church, then, sees the other image of Jonah, and it is Jesus who provides the image through His preaching. Jesus compares His own suffering, death, and resurrection in St. Matthew 12 to that of Jonah's experience: "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"(St. Matthew 12:40).

The gospel shows the Father's grace.....we see ourselves in these disciples who were fishermen. Peter would toil, throwing his net into the sea to catch fish and sometimes the net would bring in nothing. Then we see James and John mending their nets. This world affords us all trouble. It is God's curse due to sin that through much toil we will work in this world and it will bring forth thorns and thistles: work will be tough, the things that we use will break down and deteriorate over time. We will deteriorate over time due to sin.

The nets for fishing need mending for they do not continue on in this world without succumbing to the fallen effects of this world. But what is behind the statement that Jesus will make these someday apostles "fishers of men" is not the emphasis on the men as much as the net that they will use. It is the gospel net: it is Christ who shall, like Jonah, be three days and three nights in the tomb and who shall be resurrected and be found on shore cooking fish, having dominion over death--having defeated death and the grave. This is the net that Peter, Andrew, James, and John shall cast into the tempestuous and abysmal sea of hell.

Jesus alludes to this in the Sermon on the Mount: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves do not break through and steal"(St. Matthew 6:19-20). We mistakenly focus on the law side of Mark's gospel: "being fishers of men." This is the statement of Peter's apostolic task that lay in the future. What we miss and what we so desperately need is that "the kingdom of God is at hand."

There is a net that will be used that moth nor rust shall destroy. No mending is needed on the gospel net. Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection-the gospel-reaches into the places where hell's grasp holds tightly and pulls us out. Those who wallow in a life that seems dark are suddenly brought into a new place. They are brought onto shore with Jesus where a new life of forgiveness is found.

This treasure comes to you through God's faithful love and the preaching of Jesus Christ crucified, died, and resurrected, bringing you forgiveness, hope, salvation, and a new way of living and seeing this world. Moth and rust may destroy earthly things. Nets for fishing may need mending, but our Lord Christ is perfect and resilient. Nothing can destroy Christ's atonement for your sins. It is sure and certain, and it is complete.

You are on the peaceful shore with Jesus and because of Jesus. You abide in His arms and have the pleasures of heaven coming your way. The gentle waters of Christ's mercy come to us.....and we give thanks this day for such an unshakeable and sustainable gift through Christ's blood. Amen.