

3 Epiphany B 20158  
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St. Matthew's Kellers Church  
January 21, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

There's a little scene in the Monty Python movie, "The Meaning of Life," where the minister (and the congregation) seems to think that God is fishing for compliments:

**Chaplain:** Let us praise God. O Lord...

**Congregation:** O Lord...

**Chaplain:** ...Ooh, You are so big...

**Congregation:** ...ooh, You are so big...

**Chaplain:** ...So absolutely huge.

**Congregation:** ...So absolutely huge.

**Chaplain:** Gosh, we're all really impressed down here, I can tell You.

**Congregation:** Gosh, we're all really impressed down here, I can tell You.

**Chaplain:** Forgive us, O Lord, for this, our dreadful toadying, and...

**Congregation:** And barefaced flattery.

**Chaplain:** But You are so strong and, well, just so super.

**Congregation:** Fantastic.

**Chaplain:** Amen.

**Congregation:** Amen.

God doesn't need to fish for a compliment. God doesn't need our "toadying," as the British put it, nor our flattery. God exists and has existed and will exist without our constant praise. Or even our occasional praise. Yet God looks for our response. God waits for it.

God sent the reluctant prophet Jonah to get a response from the people of Nineveh. How many of you have read the book of Jonah, in say, the last 15 years? You have got to read Jonah. Do it this afternoon. Before the game. It will take 10 minutes. But to give you the shorter version, God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the city of Jonah's enemies, and tell them that unless they repented, God would destroy them in 40 days. And Jonah whined to God, "I don't want to tell them to repent, because if they do repent, You, God, will just forgive them." Because Jonah knew that God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. And Jonah did not want the Ninevites to repent – because he didn't want God to forgive them. So Jonah went the other way from Nineveh – had an astonishing adventure – and then was saved by God – and this is where the first reading for today picks up. God seeking a response from the evil Ninevites. We learn that after Jonah finally spoke the word of God to them, the Ninevites repented. They fasted, and put on sackcloth, mourning how they had grieved Jonah's God. And sure enough, just as Jonah expected, God forgave the Ninevites. God was pleased with their response. And "God changed God's mind about the calamity that God said God would bring upon them; and God did not do it." Apparently, God was very pleased with their response.

Maybe more pleased with their true and deep repentance than with a great deal of false praise.

Let's skip to the gospel. Jesus was walking along the shore. He saw Simon and Andrew as they were fishing, and said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." Similarly with James and John, mending nets in their boat. Their response was the same: they followed Jesus. Immediately. They dropped what they were doing. They stopped fishing, mending. They left their means of making a living. Their response was not fancy-sounding praise – it was sincere following. Not knowing where Jesus was leading them. They stepped out in faith. Jesus gave them no promises, no assurances, except for the cryptic "I will make you fish for people." It was enough for them to leave everything they knew. [Perhaps Jesus' words were spoken the way the psalmist describes God's speech: "God has spoken once – twice have I heard it – such is the power of God."] Perhaps Jesus' words were so powerful, so haunting, so clear, that it was as though the words kept on echoing, after they were spoken. They followed; they followed. And Jesus showed them how to fish for people. How to welcome people into the net of God's grace. Jesus showed them how they could be changed by God's word, God's presence. Jesus showed them how to mend nets of broken relationships, with the needle of truth and the thread of lovingkindness.

Jesus still calls for followers. Jesus calls us, to fish for people. Jesus calls us to respond to God's word of grace. Jesus calls us to live our repentance. Jesus calls us to invite others to a life of repentance, a life of being caught by grace that is bestowed when we do not deserve it. God hopes for our response. God hopes that we will make use of the nets of grace. God longs for us to throw out the hook of repentance and help others to experience the relief at being caught by the greatest Lover of all. In spite of all our squirming to get out of God's grasp. Such is the power of God. Amen