

**The Rev. Mary Haggerty**  
**St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO**  
**Third Sunday after Epiphany, January 24, 2021**  
**Jonah 3:1-5,10; Mark 1:14-20**

It's Annual Meeting Sunday. This is always an important moment of reflection in the life of a congregation, but it is particularly important this year. It has been a hard year. A year of change and a year of adaptation to things we never dreamed we would face. When I came here to interview with the vestry, you were honest with me about the challenges that St. Barnabas faces. I told you that I didn't have any magic answers, but that I was willing to walk with you in discerning the next steps for this community. Little did we know how this journey together would unfold. You called me to "come and see" where God has been present among you and where God may be leading you.

We have two stories this morning of folks who are called to "come and see." Jonah is called for a second time. The first time he refused, and God threw him into the belly of a whale. He had plenty of time to think about this call and the second time he responds. You would think God would find a better messenger, one who was readily willing and able to follow the call. But for some reason, Jonah was the one who God called to challenge Nineveh to repent. God's work got done – they repented, in spite of Jonah's resistance.

We see a very different reaction in the call of the disciples this morning. They drop everything immediately and follow Jesus. They even leave poor old Zebedee in the boat with the nets. We tend to hold this up as the ultimate response. How beautiful that they had such faith that they dropped everything and immediately followed Jesus. But don't forget the rest of the story. We know that they go on to deny him, to misunderstand him, to vie for power in the kingdom he preaches, even to run away at the moment of his arrest.

Jesus knew this call to “come and see” wouldn’t be easy. He has arrived to Galilee just after John is arrested. Jesus is proclaiming the Good News knowing that there is danger in it, that it won’t be readily received by those in power. You would think he would call stronger people, people he could count on to stand with him even in the hard moments. Wouldn’t you expect Jesus to call smarter people who could argue their way out of a fix or persuade others to do what they ask? But he calls fishermen. Fishermen who are willing to drop everything and follow him without a clue as to what that is going to mean.

When you called me to be your priest we thought we knew what that might look like. Well, turns out we didn’t have a clue either. The disciples were called away from a familiar life to a new, unimaginable life. They didn’t go seeking this. It was Jesus who called them. Jonah didn’t want to prophesy to Nineveh. It was God who persistently called him. We didn’t want to close our doors and become a virtual community, but God kept calling and you have continued to answer.

Listening for God’s call in Scripture and in the Eucharist was so important to you that you met outside on the grass in the hot summer sun. You met in the parking lot with your beloved pets when it was cold and damp to hear Jesus say, “come and see.” You listened from your living rooms and dining rooms to the Word, week in and week out through this past year. You laughed and shared your stories on virtual coffee hour. You switched to Zoom church when we couldn’t record anymore. Some of you can’t make it to Zoom church, but you watch the recording or you read the sermon. Some of you pray on Tuesday nights and several of you study Scripture on Sunday mornings. You continued to feed the hungry in your neighborhood and to clothe the needy at Christmastime. You always let me know me when someone in our congregation was sick or hurting so that I could reach out to them. You prayed together on the

eve of our election and you came together to pray for peace and listen for God's call after our nation's capital was attacked.

Through it all we made some mistakes, we disagreed, we misunderstood one another from time to time. Some mornings you stayed in bed because it was just too hard to do yet another Zoom church. You worried that we might not make it, that this time of pandemic might hurt us beyond repair. But you kept going and kept answering the call to "come and see."

And that is enough. That is what Jesus asks. Just "come and see." I have heard your worries in this strange year that we are too small, too old. That the neighborhood has changed too much, that things are never going to go back to what we know and love. I've heard you worry that we are not enough as we are – if only we had more people, younger people, more programs, more committees, more money.

The good news we celebrate as we reflect on the past year is that Jesus calls us just as we are and says, "come and see." Our Scriptures tell us that Jesus calls the reluctant, the old, the young, the simple and the fancy. He calls the peaceful and the angry, the cynical and the hopeful. He calls the doubting and the faithful. He calls us just as we are and that is the point. The question for us is not, "How can we be a better church?" The question is how can we live into our true identity as followers of Jesus, an identity to which we have already been called. If we focus on our lives as followers who are willing to come and see, the Spirit of God will be at work among us.

None of us knows where that will lead. Jonah didn't. The first disciples certainly didn't. But they followed in spite of their fears. They let God lead. I would challenge us in this year ahead to let go of our fears about St. Barnabas. Let go of our worries that we are fading away,

that we are too old, too small, too ... fill in the blank. Jesus tells us we are enough. We are his. If we have the wisdom to listen to God calling and we have the courage to follow boldly, God's work will be done in us. We don't have a road map for that work or a time frame. We have an open invitation. An invitation that has our names engraved on it, just as we are. Shall we say yes together?