

Repent and Believe the Good News!

- ✦ **God's kingdom is near. (vv.14-15)**
- ✦ **Jesus wants fishers of men. (vv.16-20)**

In the Name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Savior and Redeemer, dearly beloved of God:

In most parts of the country this would be a strange question: “What keeps you from going fishing?” You native Minnesotans may not realize but when most Americans hear about ice fishing, they think you must be... well, Vikings – to be blunt. They’d say, “It’s too cold!” Minnesotans complain, “It’s not cold enough! In February we have to get our ice houses off the lake.” And that’s another thing. Some ice houses are nicer than your living room. Have you heard some Minnesotans tow their ice houses to North Dakota to work on the oil fields? Maybe you kids don’t like to bait the hook. Or maybe your folks make you clean what you catch. As a kid I loved to fish until I got tired of getting “skunked.”

Here’s today’s newsflash from the Holy Spirit: God wants you to go fishing every day. But first each of us needs to **Repent and Believe the Good News!** And we can’t do that until we believe...

✦ **God's kingdom is near. (vv.14-15)**

Would you ever go to church for Bible Class and Worship instead of going fishing? People who believe **God's kingdom is near** always do. Today’s **First Lesson** (Jonah 3:1-5,10) tells part of Jonah’s story. The first time God’s Word came to Jonah, he ran the other way. He wanted to drop a line, kick back, and cruise the Mediterranean. But the LORD made Jonah fish bait in a dreadful storm, saved him in the belly of a huge fish. It got indigestion so that Jonah landed as fish vomit on the shore. Could that teach you the fear of the Lord? God gave Jonah a change of heart to preach His **kingdom** in Nineveh.

When they heard their city would be destroyed in forty days, “*the Ninevites believed God.*” Faith gave them the change of heart called “repentance.” God changes your mind to believe that God must punish each and every sin. God’s Word changes your mind to believe He is merciful even to one of the cruelest cities that ever blotted this planet. “*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.*” (NIVV84) They took God’s wrath seriously. Then God’s love could come and bless them with peace.

We don’t have to rely on angry prophets like Jonah to come and preach. God’s own Son did not run the other way – not back to heaven, and not from bad news. When Jesus heard that His cousin and forerunner, John the Baptist, was thrown into prison: “*Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God.*”¹ He wanted everyone to **Repent and Believe the Good News!** That **Good News** would cost Him innocent suffering and death on the cross. Jesus said that the Jonah’s three days in the belly of the fish were a sign of His resurrection after three days in the belly of the earth. Awesome Savior!

You can’t get your life right to be right with God. You can’t ring tears enough from your eyes to wash away a single sin. And **God's kingdom** does not wait for you. No one asked Jesus to come to Galilee. He went and preached because that was His mission from God the Father on the way to the cross for our sins. When **God's kingdom** comes near, we can pray like King David in Psalm 51. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband. What could David do when he loved Bathsheba and wanted to raise their child? David prayed, “*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew*

¹ W.P. ~ Wartburg Project – Matthew popular review (w/o footnotes) the Bible text unless stated otherwise. [M.C. 1/11/2015]

a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.” (Psalm 51:10–12 NIV84) I love how God forgave him. There was grief over sin when their first son died, but then God gave them more. Solomon became king and another son Nathan is listed in the other genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3. God just wants us to confess our sin so that He can forgive and restore us to His side because every sin has been punished on Christ.

When **God’s kingdom is near**, all God’s blessings come near too. You get God’s guidance for so many challenges by reading Proverbs – a chapter a day in a typical 31-day month. And for decisions where God has not spoken, there’s so much help too. When you fear your heart might mislead you, pray against your desires. “Dear Lord, if she’s not the right one for me, or I’m not the best for her, change our feelings for each other and end this relationship.” “If that’s not the best ____ (car, house, job, degree, etc.) for me, please help me to say, ‘No,’ and be at peace with my decision.” Remember, we’re talking about things where God has not said it’s right or wrong. Then if the Lord keeps leading you in that direction and the best advice is either neutral or , “Go for it!” you can move ahead with courage and anticipate God’s blessings. As He promises: **“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”** (Proverbs 16:3 NIV84) God’s rule in your heart brings joy and peace to your life.

And yet our Lord loves us too much to sugar coat this. He inspired His Apostle Paul to write: **“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”** (Acts 14:22 NIV84) We need the miracle of God’s grace to work out everything for our eternal good. We need God’s grace to **Repent and Believe the Good News! Good News** that our sins will never be mentioned Judgment Day, only the righteousness of Jesus which God credits to us by faith. **Good News** that life has real purpose because...

✦ **Jesus wants fishers of men. (vv.16-20)**

Matthew, Mark and Luke – the Synoptic Gospels – all report how Jesus called His first disciples in Galilee. Luke adds details about Jesus preaching from Peter’s boat since the crowds were pressing so close on shore. Can’t you see the look on the veteran fisherman’s face when this inexperienced Rabbi from Nazareth says, **“Put out into the deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”** Poor tired Peter: **“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”** You know how Peter’s boat-swamping, net-breaking catch felt because you feel guilty when God blesses you in ways you don’t deserve. Peter begged, **“Go away from me, Lord: I am a sinful man!”** Don’t you love how Jesus said, “No!” to Peter’s prayer? **“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”** Peter would go fishing with Jesus every day for the rest of his life.

Peter’s partners James and John almost sank their boat too, helping to haul in all those fish. They were mending their nets when Jesus walked up the shore and called, **“Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”** Their father Zebedee didn’t have to worry about losing two of his best men. That huge catch of fish from Jesus would keep them busy and fully supported for quite a while.

“You catch ‘em; He’ll clean ‘em.” Have you heard that one. Let’s not get angry like Jonah when fellow sinners join us in repentance and faith. Let’s not be engrossed by earthly blessings as Paul warns in today’s **Second Lesson** (1 Corinthians 7:29-31). Many of you have been busy **fishers of men** by bringing generous offerings to balance our budget. May God give you great joy and satisfaction in that. Some have donated many hours and may feel like Peter fishing all night and catching nothing. Yet our Lord tells us again to “put out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch.” Keep today’s elections in your prayers for New Life. And in the months to come pray for God’s grace to get busy with community outreach, personal evangelism and long-range planning that gets implemented. May our hearts never be too cold to fish. Warm us, O Lord, to **Repent and Believe the Good News!** Amen.