

We each are called, and we each proclaim God's saving message.

God seems to choose the most unlikely people to proclaim the good news: a prophet who tried to escape his call and was carried to his ministry in the belly of a large fish; simple fishermen who knew a lot about bait and nets, but little about preaching; a tent-maker who became a disciple when the power of God knocked him down. And today, in our day and age? God calls the likes of an elementary school teacher, a stockbroker, a waiter, a doctor, a clerk, a firefighter and so on.

The message heard in both the first and the third readings is the same: Repent! Reform your lives! Believe in the Gospel! And today, in our day and age? The message is: Stop taking advantage of each other! Forgive those who have offended you! Share what you have with those less fortunate! Be sensitive to the limits of Earth's natural wealth! Believe in the Gospel!

Saint Paul tells us that "the time is running out." Jesus declares, "The kingdom of God is at hand." Both are referring to the new age, the time of fulfillment. The Greek language employs two words for time: *chrónos*, which is normal linear time, and *kairós*, which is extraordinary "time out of time." Paul is talking about *kairós*, a critical time that calls for a very different manner of living, one that demonstrates that

the new age has already arrived. Jesus proclaims that this new age, this *kairós*, is at hand, and like the prophets of old, he calls for a change of heart.

The challenge presented today is startling. Jonah brings the message of salvation to the Ninevites, people known for their brutality. Paul exhorts us to live in this world as if we were not living in it. Just what does this new age demand? What is God expecting of us? Are we to be concerned with the well-being of a nation that has proven itself our enemy? Are we to live in opposition to the pleasure-seeking standards of society? Who can do this? Who even wants to do it?

But there really are people who live this way. We have heard of soldiers who protect civilians caught in the terrors of war. We have watched emergency personnel disregard their own safety for the sake of others. We know parents and grandparents who deny themselves in favor of their children and grandchildren. Heroic actions often stem from doing what simply must be done, despite any difficulty.

If we act out of compassion rather than indifference, out of understanding rather than disdain, out of kindness rather than selfishness, we will indeed bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God. And we will have a story to tell that will top even Jonah and the whale.

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