

January 21, 2018 Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

As we come together to celebrate the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, we seem to be continuing this “winter roller coaster”, with us currently in a few welcome days of warming temps with the accompanying thaw. And we take comfort in the fact that the days are getting “longer” and Spring is exactly two months away. One of the great characteristics that we human beings have is, that despite what current problems/challenges that confront us, we keep moving forward as long as we have hope---a vision for something better in the future.

In the midst of the very distressing political situation that our country is currently enduring with the Government “shut-down”, with each side blaming the other, and all people genuinely disgusted with any lack of leadership from anyone, there are actually much more serious problems/challenges facing the world in general, and each of us individually. Our Scripture Readings for this Third Sunday of the Year give us hope---a vision for something eternally better in our future---and therefore, our motivation to continue doing our best to cope with the challenges facing us in our present circumstances.

We heard about the Ninevites in today's First Reading, and the Corinthians in our Second Reading. In each case, the people were living with a life-threatening circumstance. God pressured Jonah into being His Prophet---His “spokesperson”---to the Ninevites. The last thing that Jonah wanted to do was to be a part of any effort to save the hated Ninevites. Jonah went to great lengths to avoid this “mission”, as we all know from the well-known account of Jonah. He ran away from the Lord by getting on a ship going in the opposite direction from Nineveh; he was thrown overboard when the boat encountered a storm threatening destruction; he was swallowed by a whale and spewed up on Nineveh's shore, where God once more commanded Jonah to go and speak on His behalf, calling the Ninevites to conversion of heart or face catastrophic destruction. As unwilling and unenthusiastic as Jonah's message was, the Ninevites

“heard” his message, *Forty days more and Nineveh will be destroyed*”, and the whole city immediately repented, and were saved. In our Second Reading, St. Paul was urging the Corinthians, who were in a life-threatening circumstance of living in opposition to God’s ways, to embrace a similar change of heart as he warned them *“your time is running out”*.

Why do you think it is that we human beings tends to ignore the Truth, whether it is about our personal health, or an unhealthy personal relationship, or something as huge as the world-wide situation of the threats of nuclear warfare and continued religious persecutions of people in various parts of the world? Why do we remain skeptical about circumstances such as these until we are faced with an ultimatum or a life-threatening moment, as the people of Hawaii experienced due to that “false threat” of an impending nuclear attack just a week ago?

Jesus entered into our world to bring us the Good News of God’s love. His message is simple, yet profound. In today’s Gospel Reading from the very first chapter of St. Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is just beginning his public ministry. St. Mark records for us what His very first “sermon” was---what His inaugural message, and really what would be His constant message, was: *“This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”* And then, immediately, he began calling disciples to follow Him and to embrace this new way of living: Simon (Peter) and Andrew, James and John. He tells people how to turn away from the mistakes of the past; and He calls us to embrace the ways---His ways---to move us happily into the future.

Jesus revealed that the Kingdom of God was **here** and **now**. Jesus came to “bridge the gap” between heaven and earth, and He did that in Himself. As One Who is completely divine **and** at the same time, totally human, Jesus **is** the personification of God’s Kingdom. While Jesus would teach and preach and work miracles for several years, the essence of His message is: *“this is the time of fulfillment; the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel.”* The Gospel, the Good News, is that God had entered into the world of His creation and become as one with His human creatures in His Son, Jesus, the Christ. Jesus

is the incarnation of that Good News---He is the Gospel! What Jesus is really telling the world is that they must come to Him, and believe in Him, and find their salvation through Him.

And when Jesus says *“this is the time of fulfillment”*, He is really saying what Jonah said to the Ninevites, and what St. Paul said to the Corinthians. This is the “ultimatum”, the “life-threatening” moment that we need to pay attention to, or run the risk of missing the Gift of Salvation. That is why Jesus goes on to say, again what Jonah and St. Paul said, and what the ongoing message continues to be of the Gospel preached to all people: *“Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”* That means that we need to take seriously this “moment” and go through whatever “change of heart” we need to go through so that we can truly believe in this Gospel---this Good News---and be a part of the Kingdom of God by being an active, believing, and witnessing member of the Body of Christ.

No one is asking us to leave our homes, quit our jobs, or travel to some far off land (like Jonah was asked and as St. Paul did). All that we are being asked to do is *“repent---believe.”* And, after we do that, then we are asked to make one more, critically important choice, namely to listen to and accept Jesus’ invitation: *“Come after Me.”*

As the “weather roller coaster” continues through this Winter, and as we look forward to Spring, may we all truly hear God’s Word today as the Word coming from a loving and merciful God Who wants nothing more than for us to live with Him, not in opposition to Him. Our God wants nothing more than for you---for all humanity---to hear His Word and respond: *“Repent...Believe....and Follow Me.”*

For all of us, our “ultimatum” moments” and “life-threatening” circumstances will likely come one day. However, I pray that we will be wise enough to not wait until those moments arrive, but rather to embrace the Truth of God’s Love and live in God’s ways **here** and **now**. Let us make sure that we are living our lives in Faith, and, in spite of whatever our life circumstances might be in the present, that we will live with the virtue of Hope, holding onto the vision of

what ultimate Goodness awaits us when we pass from this life into the Life of the world to come

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley