

JONAH 1:1-5

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai, saying, “Go at once to Ninevah, that great city, and cry out against it; their wickedness has come up before me. But Jonah set out to flee from to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish so he paid his fare and went aboard to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid and each cried to his own god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship had lain own, and was fast asleep.

MARK 1:16-20

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a new into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow some and I will make you fish for people. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little

farther, he saw James, son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them and they left their father in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

CHOICES

Jonah 3:1-5
Mark 1:16-20

One guy is running away from a challenge while the others are embracing it. It's like the recruiting commercial the Army uses where there are explosions and heavy smoke on the horizon and the soldiers do not run the other way; they fast track into the teeth of the danger. It is meant to exhibit the courage and resolve required for the job. And it forces you to answer the question of which way *you* would go.

We know which way Jonah went. God called him to travel to Ninevah with the unattractive mission to call out the people to repent of their wickedness. Instead, he jumped on a boat going in the opposite direction. That is a stark contrast to the response James, John, Simon, and Andrew made to Jesus' request to join his ministry. Did they have any idea what they were getting themselves into? Jonah had a pretty good notion that given the Ninevan's reputation for violence that he might be

ridiculed at best and stoned or set aflame at worst. Did the first disciples understand that they would be on the road for the next three years sleeping under the stars, enduring hardship after hardship and eventually being tortured and executed? What decision would you make?

Anyone who joins the military knows that they could be called up to fight in a war anywhere on earth at any time and might come home in a body bag or held hostage for many months. The risk is written into the contract. But love of country, yearning for adventure and financial support for college education are strong enough to overcome any fear.

Jonah is presented as a coward while the fishermen are presented as faithful servants. And I believe there are many occasions in our lives where we must make some difficult decisions that come our way which challenge us to say Yes or No and set off an internal debate we may lose sleep over. What will we regret more? Saying No and then feeling guilty or disappointing others, OR, saying Yes and getting us into something we did not anticipate and would have difficulty getting out of? There is always a lot of ambivalence involved when making critical decisions.

I closely followed the recent World Climate Summit and the debates among the delegates as they made non-binding commitments to save our earth from continuous overheating resulting in more severe droughts,

flooding, famine, extinction of species, hunger, mass migrations, rising sea levels—everything we already see happening multiplied to levels where we as a species could no longer cope and literally threatening the very extinction of our own species. How much time do we really have to avoid the worst of the consequences of not acting significantly enough?

There was more urgency this time than in recent years, but concessions had to be made to various industries and countries who wanted to slow walk the process. The irony is that the oil producing countries were the hosts and principle sponsors. It all came down to money and national interests, of course, but look at what our climate catastrophes are currently costing our economies. Perhaps that's why there was more urgency this time giving hope there will be progress in gradually bringing our CO2 levels down. It is not only about money, it is about politics. Who is going to be angry over the investments these steps will require? Circumstances often force us to make difficult Choices. Ambivalence again.

What role does faith play in helping us make our decisions? What sacrifices would we consider making? How would our decision impact our family members? How would it benefit the community at large? Are there actual dangers involved? What is the cost? What are the internal

benefits we would realize? Perhaps we are impulsive by nature and have to step back and give ourselves time to really think things through. Or perhaps we are procrastinators and risk waiting too long allowing any opportunity that was there to elapse.

This is all part of being human and navigating our course through life. And when you face difficult Choices, how do you employ your faith? First, be honest with yourself about your motives. Pray about it. Listen for a response. What is your gut telling you? Jonah got a second chance to make a different Choice than fleeing. After he was thrown overboard and swallowed by the great fish God saved him and gave him an opportunity to change his mind. So, with reluctance he went to Nineveh and sounded the alarm warning the people to repent or be destroyed. And you know what? Rather than mocking him and running him out of town, they actually took him seriously and saved themselves from God's wrath. But now the source of Jonah's ambivalence was revealed. For he secretly hated the Ninevans and wished them burned alive. So, when they repented, he was furious and went into a deep depression and regretted his Choice to obey God.

Simon, Andrew, James and John obviously saw something in Jesus' eyes and demeanor that touched them on a deep level gaining their trust.

But I wonder, did they leave their fishing business impulsively? Did they have wives and children? Most likely they did. And then you consider the torturous end result. The cost of that Choice was enormous. How many others had Jesus called before them who declined his invitation? Choices like this can tangle us up with ambivalence. I have tangled myself up writing this sermon. I could have entitled it, "Embracing Ambivalence" because that is what making difficult Choices requires. The message I will leave you with is that it is part of our faith journey to keep our hearts open and trust God to light our path forward. Our faith is continuously being tested...one way or another.

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