

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 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 a 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 down, 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 net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me 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.

DIFFICULT 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 has used where there are explosions and heavy smoke on the horizon and instead of running away from it, the soldiers 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 (the observer) 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' invitation 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 burned alive 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 to action 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 college tuition are strong enough to overcome that fear.

Jonah is presented as a coward while the fishermen are presented as faithful servants. And aren't there many occasions in our lives where we must make some Difficult Choices which challenge us to say Yes or No and set off an internal debate we 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 considerable ambivalence involved when making Difficult Choices, particularly when they would set your life off in a new direction.

What role does faith play in helping us determine our Choices?
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 intuition telling you? Jonah got a second chance to resolve his ambivalence and 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. He did, but it was with reluctance that he went to Nineveh and sounded the alarm warning the people to repent or be destroyed.

And you know what? Rather than mocking him, running him out of town or killing him, they actually took him seriously and saved themselves from God's wrath. You would think Jonah was both relieved and

overjoyed. But *this was very displeasing to Johan and he became angry* because he secretly hated the Ninevans and actually wished them to be burned alive. So when they repented, he was furious and went into a deep depression regretting 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. *Immediately he all them and their left their father in the boat with the hired men and followed him.* 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 could have entitled this sermon, "Embracing Ambivalence" because that is what making Difficult Choices requires us to do. The message I will leave you with this morning is that while our beloved Trinity faces an unknown future, it is part of our faith journey to keep our hearts open and trust God to light our path forward. In the big picture, our faith is continuously being tested...one way or another.

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