

Jonah had many reasons why he was not the man for the job. Yet God chose him anyway, or maybe because he was selfishly normal. It made no sense to use a reluctant missionary, yet God's plan needed Jonah to succeed.

The wealthy, powerful, religious leaders of Jerusalem had many reasons why fishermen, tax collectors, and obviously sinful people were an embarrassing choice of followers for someone who many assumed was the promised Messiah! But Jesus called them precisely because they best would be examples and witness of grace.

So why then, is it often so difficult to understand Jesus has a reason for using us as well? Why assume someone else would be better to share Jesus' love or explain how faith works? Why do we have more of Jonah's excuse-making tendencies, than the disciples' willingness to simply follow? Whether Jonah was bait or disciples were only fishermen didn't matter, as God made them all successful!

How many abandoned dogs make the best pets? How many lives with physical or emotional limitations became inspirations for all they touch? How often have terrible tragedies or even death become life changing moments for others? Isn't it amazing to watch as God takes the simple and ordinary and makes it useful and beautiful?

From dust God created a man and a woman. From a manger he created hope! From a garden tomb he created new life! Why be surprised that despite a poor attitude, Jonah was successful prophet? Afterward he complained to God, saying "I'll bet you could have done this without me!" (And God could have, but isn't it more powerful the God chose?) There was a reason God asked Jonah to go and preach in that city.

Today God touches each of us as well! We fuss like Jonah. We second guess ourselves as Jesus' disciples must have. And God uses us anyway. We make excuses about time or limited abilities, and God patiently waits us out. Where might Nineveh be for you?

Would you go to your Nineveh if God called? Would you walk away from your boat? Go to a stranger? A friend who hurt you deeply? Going to Nineveh or Jerusalem is no easier or more difficult today than it would have been for Jonah or fishermen Jesus chose as disciples. If Jesus came to you right now and said "please go" what would you do?

Jonah knew he would be a Jew in the middle of an unclean, pagan, hostile empire! And that was enough to make him say NO and run away. And yet when he went, he turned the tide. The fishermen Jesus approached were considered "unclean, uneducated country bumpkins" by the religious and political leaders. And yet God's powerful love allowed them to succeed by faith. Never forget that God worked through them

because they were faithful to God! And he used them just as they were, imperfect, normal, everyday people!

When I was a youngster and walked into my house, and my mom's first words were, "Where have you been?" my response was always panic. Was I late for dinner? Did I forget something I had promised? What did mom know? (How did she find out?) And those words continue to evoke a similar response when I am asked that today.

But what a great question for each of us to ponder! "Where have YOU been?" Jonah must have dreaded the possibility of that question being asked of him. (Who would believe such a fishy story?) What about the disciples from Galilee? (How much credibility would they have in Jerusalem as people realized that they were "only fishermen.")

Do you worry that people will judge where you are from? Or who you are? Or what your weaknesses might be? (Do we do that to others?) What might be excuses to us can open doors for others! God has a plan for each of us, just as he did for Jonah and those disciples. Baptism calls to share *his love in my daily world*. It is not me, but the incredible love of Jesus that is becomes the power to change!) The Good News is that God calls people no matter where they've been or WHO they are!

Where have you been? Of course we are embarrassed by our mistakes. We downplay our successes. We are private about our grief and losses. We often feel broken, inadequate, and we certainly don't feel that we have any skills or abilities to be of use in God's plan for outreach.

But where you have been makes your life unique. Your life experiences are opportunities waiting to be forgiven or shared. Where have you been is our confession that leads to our discipleship. We get so nervous and uptight when we sense that question is coming. Like an eight year old worrying "what did I do now?" we worry that "where we have been" will embarrass us OR will not be impressive to those who ask.

And at first our responses are typical: I'm just a full-time mom, or dad. Only a teacher. Unemployed! My divorce is embarrassing. I am ashamed because of my alcohol problem. I am failing with our household budget. I don't feel comfortable saying a prayer or talking about faith. And like Jonah we miss the point of the question. Where we have been is the vehicle for God's love -- for he chooses and uses out of love not reward! And each of us is blessed by God to be a blessing to each other.

The question is no longer "do you smell like a fish," but does your presence have the fragrance of Jesus' love? That is why it was so important for God to take on flesh ... to live our lives and die our death. His call comes from experience. His power comes from love! "Where we have been" makes us unique and gives us the point of our witness. Consider the fish smell that touched Jonah. That was a sign of his struggle

with God--the power of his witness. He could proudly say, "This is where I have been...and God's love never let me go."

It was not because of Jonah that people believed, but because God turned such an unwilling messenger around!

Think about the scarred hands and wind-beaten faces of disciples, which announced a loving God who had use for them! It is interesting that each disciple of Jesus was called from their normal routine to do something different. They didn't come to Jesus; he came to them! And he comes to each of us today with the same call. We all are useful because we are all so unique.

There is a fishing expression that comes up when someone simply sits in a boat, complaining and grumbling because they can't catch fish. The expression is "either fish or cut bait!" If you aren't going to fish yourself, at least help those who are. Either way, you will be a benefit and support the effort. The only reason one gets in a fishing boat is to fish. The reason for baptism is to be filled with Christ's loving light!

God doesn't call most of us to stand on street corners and preach to huddled masses. But He does call each to let his Light shine through "me."

It is time to stop hiding behind "who you are" or "where you have been," and let God be the judge of how your uniqueness might serve others. When Jonah quit running and fishermen simply trusted Jesus' call, miracles followed – fish smell and all. And so it daily will be for you and me!

Whether you see your job as fishing or just cutting bait, both are needed for success. You can run and hide or follow Jesus. And if you follow Him, you will always succeed.

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