

Sermon Notes: Why Be Christian?

Week #3

Introduction

This week we continue our post-Christmas sermon series called “Why Be Christian?” As we explore texts from the story of Jonah and the call of the disciples, we will consider the importance of our response: our response to God, to our faith, to the circumstances of the world. In doing so, we will ask ourselves whether these responses should be inward or outward... or perhaps both!

Illustration Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4PYI6TzqYk>

A clip from the 1997 film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* where an effort at complex communication begins and grows.

Video Discussion Questions

1. This is a classic science fiction movie with fantastic imaginative plot points and imagery. In this clip, scientists (who are also musicians??) are communicating with other-worldly beings using music! From a technical perspective, this is similar to [the 90s sounds of modems with their chirps and static sounds](#). It was known as a “handshake” and it required two-way communication. Another analogy would be in the musical field of improvisational jazz, where one instrument responds to another in melody or rhythm. What other examples can you think of where a kind of initial negotiation is necessary? Can you think of times this went well? Can you think of times this went poorly?
2. What do you think would have happened if the scientists/musicians didn’t respond to the musical prompt from the giant vessel? What do you think would have happened if the responses were limited rather than continual?
3. Eventually in this clip, computers take over and most of the people in camera become observers. As we observe them, many seem to break into smiles or other expressions of wonder. Where do you think this comes from? Have you ever experienced something like this? How does the ongoing sense of response impact these responses (if at all)?
4. What is your general understanding of responding (whether you think about it in technical terms, musical terms, or something else)? Is it important? Why or why not?

Jonah 3:1-5, 10 (CEB)

¹The Lord's word came to Jonah a second time: ²"Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and declare against it the proclamation that I am commanding you." ³And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's word. (Now Nineveh was indeed an enormous city, a three days' walk across.)

⁴Jonah started into the city, walking one day, and he cried out, "Just forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!" ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on mourning clothes, from the greatest of them to the least significant.

¹⁰God saw what they were doing—that they had ceased their evil behavior. So God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn't do it.

Mark 1:14-20 (CEB)

¹⁴After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee announcing God's good news, ¹⁵saying, "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom! Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!"

¹⁶As Jesus passed alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷"Come, follow me," he said, "and I'll show you how to fish for people."

¹⁸Right away, they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹After going a little farther, he saw James and John, Zebedee's sons, in their boat repairing the fishing nets. ²⁰At that very moment he called them. They followed him, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers.

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. Why did God send Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh?
2. Why is it essential for those in power to listen to and respond to God's message?
3. What are God's prophets and prophetesses telling us at this time? What is the collective response these times call for?
4. A writer & theologian from UMD Discipleship Ministries notes, "The real call of the book of Jonah is to be more like the God who sent him; the one who believes in second chances; the one who doesn't give up issuing the invitation, even when the response isn't what was hoped." What does it mean for people of faith who are in the business of making disciples who make disciples?
5. Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed Jesus (Mark 1:18). Have you ever left something behind to follow Jesus? Is there anything you need to leave behind to respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him now?

Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration

1. How do you think you would respond if someone asked you to “follow” him/her in person? What would you want to know about that person before you say, “Sure, I’ll follow you.”
2. Before you follow someone, how might you test that person’s trustworthiness?
3. The scripture (Mark 1:20) indicates that Zebedee (James’ and John’s father) was left on the boat when his sons went to follow Jesus. What kind of reaction do you think he had? How would you react in that situation?
4. How do you think the prophet Jonah’s life might have differed from that of James and John or Simon and Andrew? How might it have been the same?

Weekly Action

Consider something in your life that needs your response. Maybe it’s something relatively innocuous like an email. Maybe it’s something major. Pray about this. Take time to listen for God. Perhaps you’ll feel comforted, perhaps you’ll feel strengthened, perhaps you’ll be guided in how to respond. Maybe it will be all of these or something else! First, understand and acknowledge that *God has responded to you*. Then decide what you’ll do, and trust in God’s faith in you.

Prayer

Though often misunderstood, often held captive by fabricated realities, our souls long for peace. We run without a destination, surrounded by highways of turbulent noise. We are tired, worn, and battered, and our souls long for joy. Holy God, through it all; in it all; and around all of it; help us to choose to love the astounding teaching of the Messiah. Help us to experience peace and joy, even in the midst of disappointment, war, injustice, or poverty. Let us allow your souls to become acquainted with the One who changes hard challenges into opportunities for transformation and growth. Peace and Joy are possible in the presence of the Savior. In spite of the world’s challenges, we choose peace; we choose joy; we choose to follow *you*, O God!