

Epiphany 3B. January 21, 2018, Dungeness Valley Lutheran, Sequim, WA.
Jonah 3:1-5,10; I Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20.

I Corinthians 7:

Brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. **For the present form of this world is passing away.**

Mark 1:

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.**’

16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ ¹⁸And **immediately they left their nets and followed him.** ¹⁹As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

²⁰Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

The telephone rang. “People are coming here.” “Lots of people.” “Planes are landing.”

The mayor called the grocer, “We’re gonna need a lot of food.”

Later: “There will be children on the planes. We’re gonna need diapers.” Later: “There will be babies; we’re gonna need formula.”

The SPCA volunteer called, “We’re gonna need dog and cat food.”

We’re gonna need blankets, cots, places for them to sleep.

We’re gonna need interpreters; some of them don’t speak English.

We’re gonna need someone to help them understand – or at least a bunch of TVs here in the school where some of them are gonna sleep. We’re gonna need some counselors, some chaplains.

Why us????? Why are they HERE? So went the first 15 minutes of phone conversation in Gander, Newfoundland, on September 11, 2001.

Why here, why us? In the small town of under 10,000 people, planes were delivering about 7,000 children, old people, Africans, Norwegians, New Yorkers, people from South America, Asia. Rich and poor. Old and young. Babies. Pets. They were landing in Gander because the air space over their destination airports of Kennedy, LaGuardia and Newark was closed and would remain closed for several days.

People staggered off the 38 planes where they had been kept for hours, some for 2 days. The Salvation Army uniforms of the Gander folk looked like military to frightened foreigners who feared a coup. Tough New Yorkers were worried about their wallets. Few had ever heard of Gander -- chosen because of its airport's large number of runways -- remnants of days long ago when planes flying to and from Europe refueled there. No one had done that in a very long time and the town had wanted to tear those runways out—just hadn't gotten around to it.

For everyone -- those from Gander and those from away -- it felt -- as the writer of I Corinthians put it -- as though "the present form of the world is passing away."

Immediately, immediately the town rallied. The striking school bus drivers postponed their strike to provide transportation. The SPCA gathered the animals, but all other baggage was off limits. The town collected food, diapers, grills from every home, bedding, clothing, toilet and hygiene items. They organized a huge days-long barbeque. They housed the guests in schools, churches, and in their homes.

Then people began to tell stories. Stories of their sons who were firefighters in New York. Stories of lost loves. Stories of children back home. Stories of strife in the country they had left. Stories of New York streets and fear of strangers.

Phone connections were scarce and many calls did not go through.

As people began to turn away from the TVs, they started to eat, tried to sleep. They turned to prayer, kneeling in churches, bowing over small black prayer books, unrolling rugs and placing their foreheads on the floor facing East. Someone began to sing, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

People argued. People reconciled. People sang songs, danced, joked -- and worried. Both good and bad news from home slowly dribbled in. People rejoiced with the good news and wept over the bad.

The present form of the world as they knew it was passing away.

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In today's Gospel four little words signify the present form of the world passing away for John the Baptist and for Jesus. "After John was arrested." John would never again see the light of freedom. He would languish in Herod's dungeon until his beheading. Jesus left Judea and returned to Galilee. He gathered friends who would come to call disciples: Nathaniel, Andrew, Peter, Philip, James and John.

He told them the kingdom of God was near. And immediately they followed him.

The present form of the world as they knew it was passing away.

No longer would fishing be their occupation. They would follow Jesus and participate in his healing, feeding, preaching and forgiving ministry. They would also suffer along with him. And they would be there on Easter morning and on Pentecost when the Spirit filled them and dispersed them to the four winds to tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and of God's forgiving love for humanity.

The Kingdom of God was near, was right there! Some people call the Kingdom of God the Kin-dom of God. Less emphasis on a king, and total emphasis on God's people as KIN, one with another. All people united under God's umbrella of love. To the new disciples, and John the Baptist who was comforted in prison by the news, this Kin-dom meant healing, wholeness, forgiveness and the peace of God that passes human understanding – that peace which buoys us up when all else seems to be passing away.

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In Gander, after a few days, people and planes were cleared to return to New York. Their world had been turned upside down. Some returned to mourn, some to reunite with loved ones. All had witnessed earth-shaking things. First the tragedy of 9/11 and then the amazing generosity, hospitality, friendship and care given by the people of Newfoundland. Many stayed in touch over the years. No one ever asked the guests for money, but the guests created large scholarship funds for the young people in that place of hospitality. Yes, the school bus strikes resumed. Yes, the SPCA still needed funds and volunteers. Yes, the people had to sort out the grills, launder or discard the worn clothing and bedding, heal their exhaustion with naps and conversation and, yes, rejoice for a job well done, a mission well-accomplished.

Jesus and his friends also accomplished a mission. Had they given up in despair, we wouldn't be here today to thank them, to rejoice in their job well done. To know in our hearts that in spite of all the "passing away things" in our world, we

are whole, at peace, and we can rest in God's arms. Jesus' generous hospitality welcomes us to his table each week, welcomes us to his compassion and encouragement.

So when the phone rings and we hear a call – we immediately respond. “We’re gonna need food,” “We’re gonna need a good word of comfort, of challenge, of hope.” “We’re gonna need ... you will know the call when you hear it. Pick up the phone. Get ready to run. Why here? Why us? Because Jesus is on the phone.

For, yes, the form of this world is passing away. We’re awash with lies, unending war, failure to communicate, hunger and poverty. May that form of the world pass away and may the kin-dom of God come among us.

May the lies give way to truth, the unending war to peace, and may we find ways to serve like the people of Gander and to do as Jesus did: heal, feed, teach and forgive. For in his grace, we are given life. Amen.