

Now **after** John had been delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee . . . In the Markan story line John is arrested, imprisoned, and killed, without the reader hearing another word from him. John, a faithful prophet, never knew if the word he proclaimed came to pass.

According to Deuteronomy, the way you know a prophet's word is from God is if it becomes reality. John stands as a model for prophets of all time who are called simply to be faithful to the word they are given, without claiming to see its "success."

*The word of the Lord came to Jonah a **second time** . . .* Its "success" is precisely what Jonah feared, his reason for fleeing the first time, and his begrudging witness the second time. Jonah was a Jewish nationalist; Nineveh be damned!

Hear another translation of Jonah 3:3-4: *And Jonah rose up and went to Nineveh, according to the word of God. Now Nineveh was a great city of God, a walking journey of three days. Nineveh, a great city, is a city of God.*

Jonah may be a Jewish nationalist, but God's dominion and care is universal. Citizenship in the dominion of God relativizes the citizenship stamped on our passports. Our ultimate allegiance is not to a flag but to the kingdom of God.

The kingdom (dominion) of God is a metaphor derived from the world of oriental potentates. It does not intend any one-for-one correlation of God's will with earthly monarchies or democracies. The notion of Christian nationalism is anathema. The dominion of God, where justice is tempered with mercy but never denied, refers to God's eternal and universal rule.

Jesus announces the good news of the reigning presence of God, but he does not do it alone. Jesus is not a solitary individual, a "great man" who affects history. From the very beginning of the story, the story of Jesus is the story of a community, of Jesus-in-relation-to-his-disciples.

Jesus calls two pairs of brothers who are professional fishers to follow him and learn to fish for people. In both the Greco-Roman environment of Jesus' day and in Jewish circles, a "fisher of people" is often a teacher and different kinds of pupils are compared to different kinds of fish.

There is no suggestion whatever that any of these fishermen have previously met or heard of Jesus. The very absence of psychological motivation serves to emphasize the overwhelming power of Jesus' word. Mark has made the fisherman's immediate response itself into a miracle. Mark did not have to explain to his audience what this implied.

In a setting where poverty was prevalent, departure from their business would jeopardize their family's livelihood and risk dissolution of the household: the basic social

institution in which ancient Mediterranean economy was embedded. As God's dominion breaks in, previous patterns of life are reconfigured; families are dissolved without warning.

The pain of that rupture, muted in the reading for today, becomes vivid later in Mark. Jesus promises Peter that things better and worse await. The reader begins to understand that repentance involves casting off conventional responsibilities, that trust in the gospel implies worldly insecurity, that discipleship to Jesus carries a price.

*The **appointed time**, Paul writes, has grown short . . .* I'm not, as you know a musician, but I want to attempt a musical metaphor to explain Paul's challenging admonitions.

Cantus firmus is a preexisting melody forming the basis of a polyphonic composition. Our relationship with God is the cantus firmus, what we do and how we live is the polyphonic composition. Paul is advising us to live in harmony with the preexisting melody that is our relationship with God. Discord follows when we treat the present realities of our lives as if they were eternal, when we mistake temporal values for transcendent values.

The word translated "time" in the readings from 1 Corinthians and Mark is the Greek *kairos*, not *chronos*. Chronos is the ordinary measurement of time in hours, days, weeks, years. Kairos refers to a specific quality of a particular period of time.

Kairos often constitutes a critical moment when much is at stake. It can be a time of distress which may pass, or it may include distress but also constitute a time of opportunity.

In this kairos moment of our history, the Psalmist (62) advises, *Put not your trust in status, power, or wealth, for these are fleeting things, temporal values; rather, put your trust in God alone, whose love is steadfast*, the cantus firmus of our lives, of creation itself.