Epiphany 3B January 25, 2015

Readings each Sunday Vanderbilt lectionary library and Textweek

Epiphany 3B January 25, 2015 Textweek

Jonah 3: 1-10; Psalm 62: 5-12; 1 Cor 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20

Epiphany 3B January 25, 2015 website

On the whole, we don't know the future. We've not much idea, if at all, of what's going to happen to us – where we'll be, what we'll be doing, who we'll be with, or what our circumstances will be. And this is a mercy. God keeps the futurfromus, and for this we thank God.
Because if I knew in advance everything that's going to happen to me, I don't think I'd be able to cope. It's bad enough, when I look back at what's happened to me in the past.
Imagine how unbearable it would be if I knew everything that's going to happen to me in the future.
It was the same for the disciples. From the very beginning, they were kept in the dark.
What they were to be, and what they were to do, was revealed to them only bit by bit.
The first time they make an appearance, in the reading we have as today's Gospel (Mark 1: 14-20), all that's said to them is that they're to go with Jesus, and that he would make them people who fish for others. Which tells them very little about what's involved – only that instead of fishing for fish, they will fish for people.
What were they to make of that? Not much, except that whereas in the past they'd dealt with fish, in the future they were to deal with people instead. And this is all they were told.
But as the Gospel goes on, what the disciples are to be, and what they're to do, is gradually revealed to them. But it's very gradual.
It's not until chapter 3 that the Twelve are told they'll be sent out to preach, and to have power over demons.
It's not until chapter 6 that they're told they must proclaim the coming rule of God, cast out demons and heal the sick.
But even then the full implication of discipleship isn't revealed to them.
All they get so far is that they are to do what Jesus does - proclaim the coming rule of God, cast out demons, and heal the sick.
What they don't realise then is that that's not all. Just imitating Jesus' actions won't be enough.

What's yet to come for them is that they must be transformed, changed internally. They must become different people.
It won't be enough simply to do what Jesus does. They must become what he is.
So they must become new beings, with new hearts, new attitudes, new understandings, new perceptions, bearers of the Spirit.
And to become this, they must grapple with the hardest part of discipleship.
Suffering. They must suffer.
Just as the Son of Man must suffer, so must they, in order that they may become what he is.
The words that Jesus uses on his first meeting with the disciples – Come with me, follow me, be with me conceal an awful truth – that they must suffer, as he suffered.
Mercifully for them, they only realize this when it was too late.
It's the same for us.
When we begin our journey in the Christian faith, we don't see all that's involved.
We think it's to do with those things that were the bread and butter of Jesus' daily life – loving, accepting, teaching, healing, forgiving, restoring.
But then, well into our journey, more is revealed to us. And the 'more' is the realization that we can't be with God if we're still with ourselves. It's the realization that 'self' will have to be lost, if we're to do what we've been appointed to do.
And this was never obvious to us at the beginning. When we started out, the absolute requirements of discipleship were hidden from us.
And we thank God for this, for if we'd known what would finally be required of us – that we must suffer as Christ suffered, we wouldn't have been able to cope.
Mercifully, as with the first disciples, we only realise what's fully required of us eventually, when it's too late to avoid it.
So thanks be to this God, who leads us into all truth, but gradually, and makes us anew in his image, but gently, so that we can cope, always, and be neither afraid nor destroyed.
To this gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be ascribed all praise, worship, thanksgiving and honour, this day, and for evermore.
Amen.

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