

Third Sunday After the Epiphany
Cycle B, RCL
Revised

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

The “book” of Jonah is actually a short story coined some time after the exile in Babylon and devoted both to the entertainment of its hearers and to their education. Jonah receives mention in the Hebrew Bible only in the story that bears his name and in 2 Kings 14:25 as a prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel during the eighth century BCE. In Jonah 1 we learn that Jonah refused to carry God’s warning of destruction to Israel’s enemy Nineveh. Instead, the prophet fled by ship to Tarshish on the eastern coast of Spain. On the way, however, God threw a storm upon the Mediterranean, and in desperation the sailors on the ship cast Jonah into the sea. A giant fish swallowed him and Jonah resided in the fish’s stomach three days and three nights. Chapter 2 is a thanksgiving psalm inserted by a later hand. Our passage, from Chapter 3, has Jonah go to Nineveh and proclaim only the minimum warning possible, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed!” Miraculously, the whole city repented of its evildoings, much to Jonah’s disgust.

Psalms 62:6-14

Commentators often regard this psalm as a homily instead of as a prayer. Like Psalm 23, we should term this a *psalm of trust*, a psalm without clear setting in the cultic life of Israel. Psalms of trust often sound like those portions of laments that show confidence that God will hear the psalmist’s prayer. Whether preaching ever formed any part of the temple liturgy is unknown. There is no evidence for it.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Albert Schweitzer coined the expression “*status quo* ethics” to describe Paul’s moral teaching in passages such as this. Schweitzer explained that Paul counseled acceptance of the social and personal *status quo* because the Christian was to look beyond the present situation to the coming kingdom of God for redemption from the unjust structures of this world. Paul’s major struggle with the Corinthians was to help them understand themselves as belonging to a new world order entirely.

Mark 1:14-20

Jesus was a wandering teacher of a kind that disappeared after the Jewish revolts of 66-72 CE and 132-135 CE. Such a teacher would call students (“disciples”) to accompany them on their travels and learn his *torah* (“teaching”) before returning home. Students would pay the teacher a fee and would help defray the costs of the wandering school. When students had successfully learned the *torah* of their masters, they were themselves able to call their own students. Hence the promise to Simon and Andrew in 1:17 that they will “fish for people.” Mark presents Jesus and his disciples as fitting this mold of the wandering teacher and his disciples but has Jesus’ *torah* be the revolutionary disclosure of the coming of God’s kingdom on earth.