

CALLED TO DO WHAT?

A SERMON FOR ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION
SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2015
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
TED W. LAND, INTERIM PASTOR

JONAH 3:1-5,10

MARK 1:14-20

Until I looked at the lectionary lessons for this Sunday side by side, I'd never thought about the parallels and the contrasts of two very familiar stories.

First, both of them involve fish! These first disciples that Jesus called were fishing, and Jonah wound up in the belly of a great fish!

Second, they were all Galileans. Jonah was an obscure prophet who counseled King Jeroboam II in a successful conflict with the Syrians. Simon later called Peter, Andrew, James, and John were all fishing in that body of water known as the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called them.

Third, they were both called to leave what they were doing, to leave their lives as they knew them behind, to do something they'd never thought of doing.

And fourth and finally, they were all called to bring people into a new and different relationship with God.

This afternoon, I will be giving the charge to a teaching elder, CK Moore, who is being installed as pastor of Northminster Presbyterian Church in Pensacola. CK never started out to be a pastor. He wanted to be a coach. And he sure didn't imagine himself in Florida. He's a Californian. But he came to Florida from Oklahoma. Talk about a fish out of water!

But CK has gone where God called him to go, much in contrast to Jonah. When God called Jonah to go to Nineveh the first time, Jonah got on a ship sailing for Tarshish, at the other end of the world.

The four fishermen, when Jesus called them, followed Jesus, went where He went, and died much as He died.

Now the five ruling elders who are to be ordained and installed here this morning are not being called to go to Nineveh, nor are they being called to leave their nets and boats behind, and follow Jesus who knows where. They are not being called to die for Jesus or like Jesus.

Their call is in some ways harder: they are being called to live for Jesus; they have been called, to serve Jesus, to follow Jesus, to live for Jesus right where they are, doing the same things they have been doing, living the same lives they have always lived, but with a new charge: to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

That is the vow that all who would serve the Lord as officers in the Presbyterian Church (USA) take. Well, one of them, you'll hear them all later.

Now let's face it: some of us are blessed with more of those qualities than others. I've reached the point where I don't have nearly as much energy as I once had. That is why you need a younger pastor, someone with enough energy to keep up with your Wild Wonderful Wednesday group, the youth group, even those Wildflowers who meet once a month.

By the way, when you go into the Fellowship Hall to eat lunch after church, check out the refurbished bulletin boards in the hallway. The Wildflowers had an arts and crafts night at their last meeting, and those boards are the result. You've got plenty of energy in this group of five we will ordain and install this morning. And those bulletin boards show imagination as well.

I've got a lot of imagination myself. I keep imagining the future, the future of this church, the future of our Presbytery, the future of our denomination. Some days, I think that I am a dreamer rather than a visionary. But wait! That is what I'm supposed to be! According to the prophet Joel as quoted by Simon Peter on the day of Pentecost: the young men will have visions and the old men will dream dreams! This church needs a young pastor with vision. Literally and figuratively.

Intelligence? This group has it in abundance, and that is another reason to pray for the PNC: I'm not as smart as I used to be. Wiser, maybe, but not as smart, and certainly not as technologically savvy as our younger teaching elders. To be a 21st century church, you need 21st century intelligence. I used to say of one of our spinoff denominations that they had some of the finest theological minds of the 19th century. The only problem was they were formed in the last quarter of the 20th century. We are rapidly nearing the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. It is time for a 21st century intelligence in the leadership of the church, and you are getting it in your ruling elders, and you need it in your teaching elder as well.

And love: you are ordaining and installing men and women who love this church. On any given Sunday, there will be three generations of the families of some of these elders in this church, and the love they have for this church is obvious. These people would not be here if they did not love this church.

I don't think it is any secret that I love this church. On my first Sunday in Arcadia, the church I served for twenty six years, Polly and Kris and I were invited out to supper at the home of Bill Williams, the church treasurer and his family. After supper, Bill said, "I've just got one question to ask you: why did you come here?"

I knew he didn't mean why did we come to his house, I knew he meant why had I come to Arcadia, Florida, to be pastor of First Presbyterian Church.

The answer came from my heart: "I've come to love you."

And going on thirty years later, I still love that church, and I love all the churches I've ever served.

My hope, my prayer, my vision, my dream for this church is that your new pastor, your next pastor, will come to love you.

What are you called to do? To serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

And as the Apostle Paul said in another context, the greatest of these is love.