

Following Jesus in Uncertain Times

January 24, 2021, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel of Mark 1:14-20

Fr. John

There is a story about the old movie comedic actor, W.C. Fields, who, on his deathbed was caught reading the bible. Fields, a long time avowed atheist, was asked if he was undergoing a religious conversion. To which he replied in his famous sonorous voice: 'Certainly not - I was only looking for contradictions!'

Well one doesn't have to look too far in the bible to find seeming contradictions or at least conflicting messages.

Jonah, for example, the reluctant prophet is sent by God to convert the pagan people of Nineveh the capitol city of the Assyrians the sworn and feared enemy of the Israelites. It seemed like a doomed mission from the start. Yet, not only did the people of Nineveh heed the message and change their ways, they showed even greater reverence to God than Jonah himself who thought that God had made a fool out of him and went off and pouted about it.

St. Paul in today's second reading tells the Corinthians to live as if Christ's second coming was just around the corner and urges them to set aside all their normal endeavours and wait. Yet there are other times when Paul gives much different advice and urges the community to actively engage in their day-to-day occupations and not pass their time idly. 'Those who do not work should not eat' he tells the Thessalonians.

Then, in today's gospel reading, Jesus calls forth followers - not from the religious ranks of the pharisees, scribes and the temple priesthood as might be expected. Rather he recruits rough hewn and probably illiterate fisherman to be his future apostles.

So, if we are looking for logic, at least human logic, in the way God acts, we might be quite puzzled by the way He goes about it.

A year ago at this time, the coronavirus was only a rumour in a far off part of the world. We had no idea how it would ultimately affect virtually every aspect of our lives. And how many of our everyday routines would be disrupted or altered.

When the logic of our world falls apart and we are forced to question many of our assumptions and motives for our former way of living - we are given an opportunity to grow in purity of heart and sincere devotion to God.

Somehow we need to learn something of God's logic. We need to learn to be one at the same time - realists and mystics; using this world and not using it; energetic yet totally dependant on God; loving others and loving God; able to hold on and able to let go.

As that well-known passage from the Book of Ecclesiastes states: There is a time and a purpose for everything under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die... a time to mourn and a time to laugh... a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing...' [Ecclesiastes 3].

Faith means that we are able to live with seeming contradictions and maintain trust in God when there are no explanations in the profound mystery that life is.

But within that mystery lies the reign of God to which Jesus came to proclaim. And so he invites us, as he invited the fisherman of Galilee to come follow him in this great adventure. And our response will hopefully be as in today's psalm: Lord, make me know your ways.