

Each week I print out the propers on a couple of sheets of paper—the collect and the readings from the old testament, psalm, new testament, and gospel—surrounded by wide margins. Then I begin to look at them.

Yesterday I was stopped short by the first line in the first element, the Collect: Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News.”

Because together in this virtual space on the brink of our annual parish meeting, those few words declare our mission and purpose as a parish church—to proclaim the good news, starting with simply *being here* and being fed by our Lord’s presence within and among us.

The good news, as proclaimed in the other readings, is that we don’t have to be stuck. Jonah, in spite of all his reluctance and judgment and initial refusal to cooperate, helped the people of Nineveh to “turn from their evil ways.” Because of him, his becoming unstuck from his stubbornness, they could see that they were not fated to be stuck in their former immoral and sinful ways. They turned from that path and allowed themselves to be set on a new one.

They all became unstuck—Jonah, those nasty Ninevites, even God, because we're told that God changed *his* mind and turned from his planned calamitous destruction of them.

Skipping ahead some five or six centuries to Mark's gospel, John tells those people ranged around the Jordan to repent and get unstuck, because the answer, your freedom, is here. Turn around and believe the good news is possible, more than that, it's real, and it's here.

Between these bookends is Paul's stern, even gloomy-sounding, but full-on presentation of the good news: "The present form of the world is passing away," he says. Stop what you're doing because something new and big and glorious is right here, and you were about to miss it, because you were stuck in wrong thinking, wrong acting. Whatever else is going on in your life, it's not as important as this saving good news.

Quoted by many since him, Theodore Parker coined the phrase "the long arc of history." He was a Unitarian minister and prominent Transcendentalist who wrote in 1853: "Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the

arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.”

In the terms I’ve been using, that long arc bends toward freeing us from being stuck in short-sighted and self-serving thoughts and actions. That arc began long ago, even before Jonah’s prophecy in the fourth or fifth century before Christ. It continues its forward progress, inviting, often dragging, us along with it.

Our mission is to cooperate with and contribute to that progress the best we can—no, better than the best we can, because we pray for God’s grace and help in doing that.

So here we are, worried about the pandemic, about a tense political situation, about social unrest, about our little parish and our finances.

These are all real, all worthy of our concern. We know some real, tangible steps to take about each of these, even if we can’t see our way through to perfect resolution, as Parker said, because our eyes reach but little ways.

That's where we've been stuck, caught in the illusion and the wrong belief that we will never find the solutions to these problems. We become stuck thinking, for example, that the only answer in politics is for *our side* to win. And that "side" is more rigid than and somehow transcends even political party.

Paul reminds us that "the present form of this world is passing away." The long arc of God's history is pulling us forward.

We wear masks, keep our distance, and get vaccinated as soon as we can, we tone down the rhetoric on all sides of political conflict, we see ourselves as "we" only, instead of "we" and "they," and we recognize where we are in the history of our parish of Epiphany. And we sincerely and humbly ask God for grace to hear his call, assured that he calls us to a present and future we could never create by ourselves alone.

We are called to know and act according to the truth that he is making each of us and all of us new, equipping us to proclaim the best, saving, Good News that God loves us all.

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