

THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

SUNDAY OF THE WORD OF GOD

January 24, 2021

Jonah 3:1–5, 10 • 1 Corinthians 7:29–31 • Mark 1:14–20

I.

I took this past week off,
and enjoyed some R and R in the mountains north of Asheville, NC,
on the border of NC and TN.

On my second day there,
I decided to hike a nearby section of the Appalachian Trail to Bald Mtn.,
which is one of the highest peaks on the AT.

According to the oversimplified local map I had,
I could access the AT via a local nature trail.

So, I set out, thinking that I would easily get to the AT.

But that's not what happened.

When I came to the end of the local nature trail,
there was another trail that went in both directions.

The sign in front read, "AT" and an arrow pointing left.

But according to my map, the correct way was to the right.

So, I went to left for several minutes,
but it didn't seem right.

And, of course, it was cold and started snowing and then sleeting.

So, I then went back to the sign and continued in the opposite direction.

But that didn't seem right because it became a wide, snow-covered road,
with houses close by.

So, I went back again in the opposite direction,
and this time kept going.

Just past the farthest point I had reached,
there was a sign indicating an upcoming intersection with the Appalachian Trail.

So, I went on my way, and after three hours of walking through snow drifts,
I reached the summit of Bald Mtn., where it was ferociously cold.

There, I took a quick selfie, and hustled back home,
thankfully by a shorter route.

II.

This experience was a reminder to me of the importance of good signage—
for all aspects of life.

It's easy to get lost, and that becomes even more challenging
when circumstances are harsh.

Right ahead of where I had stopped was where I needed to be—
but I couldn't find it.

III.

As Christians, we believe that God provides signage—
the truth about the meaning and purpose of our lives,
and the meaning and purpose of the whole universe.

That truth is God's plan of salvation,
which unfolds in history,
from the creation of the world until the end of time.

The theological term for this reality is "divine revelation":
God shows us who he is, and therefore who we are.

Significantly, divine revelation **is** salvation:
God shows us who he is, not in some detached or academic way,
but by concretely saving us from sin.

The recently concluded Christmas season focused on one critical aspect of that revelation: the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Divine revelation means that truth is given; we only have to discover the purpose of our lives, not invent it.

Revelation is communicated to us through two channels: a written form, which is Scripture or the Bible; and an oral form, which is the Tradition of the Church, stretching back to the apostles.

Tradition is also the very transmission of written and oral truths, through such formats as the celebration of Mass and the sacraments.

Pope Francis has designated this Third Sunday of Ordinary Time as the Sunday of the Word of God, to help us deepen our appreciation of the Bible.

Scripture, because it contains God's revelation, help us encounter God and to be united with him.

The Bible expresses the divine message in human words.

It is a dynamic message that changes our lives.

The Gospel shows us how an encounter with Christ can be life-changing.

Jesus calls the first four apostles, two sets of brothers who are fishing partners.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John respond to Jesus' message quickly and generously, leaving everything behind in order to follow him.

The Gospel does not indicate why.

Perhaps they had heard Jesus' general good news:

“The Kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

I think there’s something more:
Jesus spoke in terms they could understand:

“Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

And there’s still more:
Christ was telling them that they were more than just fishermen—
not just in the sense of their occupation,
but in the sense of their life.

They were more than their sins;
a new life was possible.

That is the power of God’s message, which is an encounter with him.

It allows us to see beyond our own limited and sinful horizon.

God offers us something new, different, and beautiful:
“This is the time of fulfillment,” as Jesus says.

Unlike the apostles, we cannot encounter Jesus in a physical, audible way.

Now Christ is in heaven,
but, for that reason, he is present everywhere,
especially in the Church: through the sacraments,
in the community that gathers in his name,
and in the proclamation of Scripture.

Christ’s proclamation—his message of good news—awaits a response.

That message, which we treasure in the Bible,
is available to us,
to change how we live, and to change the world.

“Come after me,” Jesus says,
and you will have the life created for you.