

The world was transfixed this week by the tragedy of the Costa Concordia and the conversation that was released between the captain, Francesco Schettino and the Coast Guard officer, Gregorio Maria De Falco. Apparently Schettino, who had initially minimized the seriousness of the situation, had left the ship. De Falco, in the transcripts, tells him to return to the ship in no uncertain terms. Get back aboard, darn it! Only he didn't say "darn."

It seems though, that there is no evidence that Schettino did get back on board the ship, and in fact, later, indicates that he was not on the ship because he had tripped and fallen into a lifeboat. Now he is under house arrest and has been charged with manslaughter while rescuers continue to try to recover the bodies of those who died.

This story resonated with me as I studied today's readings during the week. In our first lesson, we hear that the word of the Lord has come to Jonah a second time. Why a second time? Because the first time the word of the Lord came to Jonah to head east to Ninevah, he instead took off west to Joppa, where he got on a boat headed to Tarshish which was, at that time, the edge of the known world. Clearly his goal was to get even further away from the place to which God was calling him. In fact, we hear in the story that Jonah goes *down* to Joppa, he goes *down* into the hold of the ship where he lays *down*. And then as we know, he ultimately goes even further *down*. He's trying his best to get as far as he can, both vertically and horizontally, from the call of the Lord.

And so, the second time that God calls Jonah, he maybe decides that escape is futile. After all, he told the sailors that "...he worships the Lord, the God of heaven, who

made the sea and the dry land.” Given that, maybe it has occurred to him that there is no place that he can go where God will not be. But God, even as he watched Jonah run away from his call, does not give up on Jonah, and he calls him a second time to go to Ninevah to proclaim God’s message.

So Jonah goes, and he proclaims the message God has given him as he takes three days to walk across the city. “Forty days more and Ninevah shall be overthrown.

The response to his rather brief proclamation is really amazing. The people of Ninevah immediately believed God, proclaimed a fast and everyone, great and small put on sackcloth. The part that’s not included in our passage tells us that even the King puts on sackcloth and ashes and proclaims that this shall apply not only to the king, but to all of his nobles, all humans and all animals. Imagine then, a Ninevite family’s pet hamster dressed in sackcloth and sitting in ashes.

The entire city of Ninevah repents and believes in the Lord, in rather sharp contrast to Jonah’s first response to the call of the Lord.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus is beginning his earthly ministry, following John’s arrest. He’s in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God—that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near—and calling the people to repent and believe.

Then he begins to call his disciples. First he sees Simon and his brother Andrew casting their net into the sea. Jesus calls them, saying—according to the translation we have—“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Mark tells us that *immediately* they leave their nets and follow him.

Then, as he goes a little farther, he sees James, son of Zebedee and his brother John, at their boat mending their nets. *Immediately* he calls them and they leave their father and their work and their gear and follow Jesus.

There's no arranging for someone else to do the work, no checking with their spouse or family. It doesn't even seem as though they go home to pack a bag with the basic necessities. Jesus calls and they go. No questions asked.

Wow. Not exactly Jonah. And maybe hard to imagine for ourselves. More like the Ninevites and all their animals.

I mean, we might feel like we need to put together a list of pros and cons. We might want to consult with friends and families. We might solicit the opinion of our pastor or other church leaders. Some people might even want to craft a decision tree just to be sure that the right decision is made. I know when I told my pastor, Dwight Dubois, who will be with us during adult ed next week to talk about ministry in daily life, that I was sensing a call to ministry, he suggested I try to avoid the call as a way of testing it. We might call that the "Jonah method." I told him I was too old for that.

These men make no decision trees and consult no family members, not even Zebedee who is right there looking on. They just follow Jesus.

This has been a week for me for talking about language and how what we say, or sing, reflects different theology. I had a conversation with Sean about the song that we're going to sing following the sermon. In it we'll sing, speaking for Jesus, "I'll make you fishers of men." Concerned about the exclusive language, I had proposed that we consider changing the words to, "I'll make you fish for people." Sean accurately pointed

out that that would change the meaning. That's clear as I looked at a number of different translations of that very passage.

The King James version reads, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." The New Jerusalem Bible reads, "Come after me and I will make you into fishers of people." The New International Version reads, "'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'" And from the NRSV, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

Of all of those, I like the NRSV least. In it, it sounds as though Jesus is going to give the disciples a job. They're going to be doing some fishing. But the other translations don't seem to imply a particular job or a specific task, they are about a change of identity and a change of vocation. No longer will these men be fishing as a way to pay their bills and take care of their families. Now they will become people who fish in a new way. The Message Bible puts it this way, "Come with me. I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you. I'll show you how to catch men and women instead of perch and bass."

Jesus doesn't call us to squeeze one more church-related task into already busy lives. Jesus calls us to become a new kind of people, with a wholly different vocation. That call may involve doing some particular and specific things, but I sense from our gospel passage that the doing is rooted in a changed orientation—a changed sense of who we are and who we belong to.

The interesting thing I learned from an NPR article about captain Schettino and the tragedy of the Costa Concordia is that there is no particular rule, on land or sea, that requires him to be the last to leave his ship. He does have a legal requirement to assist

those leaving the ship and to account for any who may have been killed but it's not required that he be last to leave or that he "go down with the ship." Another article I read, though, interviewed a number of ship captains, and to a person they spoke to the captain's responsibility to stay with the ship until all the people were safely off it. Not because of a statute or regulation, but instead because of a fundamental and deeply rooted understanding of the role of captain.

Before Jesus calls Andrew and Simon, James and John, Mark tells us that he is proclaiming that the kingdom of God has come near.

In confirmation this week we talked about the Kingdom of God. I shared with the students the notion that the kingdom of God is easier to understand when we think instead of the reign of God. That language takes us away from thinking of a place to instead thinking of a state of being. We decided that when someone reigns it means that they are in charge, and when we speak of the reign of God, we're talking about that state of our experience when God is in charge.

When Jesus calls us, he calls us not to do something, but to become something. To become what he will make of us in God's kingdom, in that place where God is in charge.

That doesn't mean we need to fill our lives up with "shoulds" and "ought-tos." It doesn't mean we need to find a way to squeeze another church obligation into our already busy lives. It doesn't mean we need to believe certain things, or believe enough, or believe correctly.

But it does mean two things. That we're called to trust that God does indeed reign, in our world, in our lives, and in our hearts and minds. That reign may not always

be easy or obvious—but my experience tells me that trusting in God’s reign is far better than trusting in culture’s reign, or my friend’s reign, or even my own reign.

And second, in the trusting, to listen for what God wants to make us into, to listen for what God wills us to become and to trust that God will show us the way to that godly end. Again, the way of Jesus’ call may not be easy. I don’t think it’s an accident that at the start of our passage today, we’re reminded of what the call to discipleship cost John. But when Jesus calls the disciples, he doesn’t send them off on their own, he calls them to follow after him. So they know, and we know, that wherever we are going, Jesus has been that way before us, Jesus will show us the way, and Jesus will be with us on our journey.