

Epiphany III (January 22, 2012)

*“And Jesus said to them,
‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’”*

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Leave everything behind. Such is the command with which we are confronted today. The Lord directs Jonah to drop everything, leave everything behind, and travel to a place called Nineveh to preach to the people there. Jonah at first resists, and tries to avoid the Lord’s command. Last Sunday I spoke about how God speaks to us through our consciences and by what can be perceived as an actual audible voice. Well, Jonah attempts to resist that voice. He tries to run away from it, in fact. Faced with a near-death experience, however, Jonah realizes how worldly things, including human life,

can so easily pass away. And yet he is spared by God, and he is spared for a purpose—the Lord’s purpose. The second time the Lord speaks to him, Jonah, without hesitation, obeys. Jonah now clearly understands the riches of God; the God who shall never pass away. He enters the “exceedingly large city” of Nineveh, and fearlessly preaches repentance. As a direct result, this large and glorious city sees both high and low throwing off the shackles of pride and embracing a radical humility of heart. Jonah, the preacher, has been humbled, and so now have the people to whom he preaches.

Leave everything behind. John the Baptist, who had renounced a normal life in favour of preaching repentance in the wilderness, now finds himself

arrested. Eventually he will be beheaded. Even after John's arrest, however, Jesus fearlessly preaches a message of repentance. "The Kingdom of God has come near," He says. In comparison, the kingdom of the world is of little to no worth. And, because of this, Simon and Andrew leave everything of this world behind. They drop their nets and leave their former lives behind to fish for people for Jesus' sake. And then there's James and John, who also leave their fishing gear, and their own father, and follow Jesus to live a new life. They drop their earthly livelihoods, and their security, and follow Jesus.

Leave everything behind, we are told. St. Paul, in this morning's Epistle, tells us that "the present form of this world is passing away." Paul means to set our minds

on life as a passing scene on stage. One moment we see a false reality represented by actors, and the next moment the scene has changed and is gone forever. True life is deeper and realer than this elusive life. We are taught to leave behind those earthly things to which we cling, which give us a false sense of security in this world. The present life we lead is a mere shadow compared to the solid Kingdom of God. What a contrast of thinking! We are perhaps used to thinking of the world as the tangible and the Kingdom of God as the magical and fanciful. But here we are told that the reverse is true. The Kingdom of God is what is real, and it is this present world that is fleeting.

Leave everything behind. "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time

is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news' ... And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.'" What does this mean? It means abandoning the false sense of security in which we invest in this world, and to embrace God's Kingdom as the only solid rock to which we can hold on and trust. This is what it means to "leave everything behind." To do so means that we are no longer tethered and constrained by worldly affections. It means that our souls have been liberated from bondage and tyranny, and that their true focus is restored. It does not mean that we necessarily turn our backs on all things physical at all times, for each of us is given certain responsibilities within our own contexts, but it means that we regard the things of this

world with an ordered perspective, assigning the proper value of all worldly things in direct relation to the innumerable riches of God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom is worth our undivided attention. And if this is indeed true, which I believe it is, should we not sell all we have—that is, should we not devalue what is truly of little value—and wholly invest ourselves in this new Kingdom? Should we not drop what is in our hands, as the Lord directs, and trust the Lord's call to us to be faithful and follow Him? What would hold us back?

I do not consider myself a wealthy man, but I have a savings account. Last week, I was moved by my conscience to do something which I consider radical. God spoke to me last week, and I answered. I had \$5,186.98 in my savings account. This morning I have

with me a personal cheque, made out to the Parish of St. John the Divine, for the full amount of my savings. Today I am giving all my savings away. What is stewardship? What is it to be a steward? I can preach about it, I can teach about it, and we can have a program about it, and maybe all these things will happen—but being a steward is nothing more than this: what I hold in my hand is the Lord's money, not mine. He has entrusted this money to my care, and last week He told me what to do with what is His—give it to the church. God trusts me with what is His, and I trust Him. It's a two-way relationship between my God and me. Jesus says, "Follow me," and I am hereby abandoning my security net. I am not telling you this for praise or for thanks—I desire neither. I am telling you this because as

a leader I am called to lead by example. “Practice what you preach,” they say, “Put your money where your mouth is.” It is my firm belief that this church should never, ever have to worry about making ends meet. We should have such abundance at our common disposal that we are always able to focus on mission and ministry and enlarging the Kingdom of God. Leave everything behind and follow Jesus, for He calls us to do so. Leave everything behind. Lose your life, and you will surely find it.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, glory, might, majesty and dominion, both now and for evermore.

[SEE THE NOTE ON THE NEXT PAGE]

Father A. E. Nussey

* NOTE: *Following my sermon, I invited a parishioner to come forward and speak to the church. I had shared my revelation with this parishioner days earlier, and in response he was likewise moved by God to “give it all away.” He explained this to the congregation, and he gave the church a gift of \$17,835.89, which represented the total of his savings in what he had designated his “emergency fund.”*