

The Third Sunday after The Epiphany (2018)

Mark 1:14–20 *Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

In the Name of Jesus.

Dearly beloved in Christ:

Hear the guarantee of this Gospel from the prophet Isaiah:

Awake, awake,
put on your strength, O Zion;
put on your beautiful garments,
O Jerusalem, the holy city;

for there shall no more come into you
the uncircumcised and the unclean.
Shake yourself from the dust and arise;
be seated, O Jerusalem;
loose the bonds from your neck,
O captive daughter of Zion.

For thus says the LORD: “You were sold for nothing,
and you shall be redeemed without money.” For thus says
the Lord GOD: “My people went down at the first into
Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them
for nothing. Now therefore what have I here,” declares
the LORD, “seeing that my people are taken away for
nothing? Their rulers wail,” declares the LORD,
“and continually all the day my name is despised.
Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in
that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am.”
How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good news,
who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

“Your God reigns” is the prophet’s way of saying
what Jesus proclaimed with HIS arrival: the arrival of the
Kingdom of God!

And the prophet calls it ‘beautiful!’ I just had to track that word down!

NOT ‘beauty in the eye of the beholder!’ The beauty by which we all parade and compare ourselves to each other, to find our place, whatever dim lighting and painting and foundation work we need to do to our advantage. What fear!

No! Beauty, in Isaiah’s eye—and the Lord’s!—means something that is ‘fitting, just so!’ When something goes just right, or fits just right, or completes a meal just right: ‘Beautiful!’

Even the feet! A beautiful picture of what the apostles would be for the Lord Jesus: feet to carry the unexpected, fitting, beautiful work He had come to do, to transfer us from this kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Living God, His Father and now ours too!

‘Beautiful!’

Aha! Look, dear disciples!—Look at the APTITUDE the Spirit Who lives in Jesus without measure GIVES to

you and me, whose status as endless students and learners and children the Lord calls gorgeous!

It can even be your poor pastor! The man who knows God so weakly and slightly—even I, with Peter, James and John—and poor Andrew, too!—can toddle up to the church, or the other kingdom, and de-li-ver the straight dope on every man's God, the Living God, from Whom we WERE made, and from Whom we draw life now!

He delivered His Gospel to Peter, James and John. Read their track-record! Don't judge the man! Judge the message!

AND—wow!, stunning!—when this poor man, or any other who claims to speak for your heaven, 'uglies' it all up: you, dear disciples, have now learned to sniff that out too, and not be fooled about your God.

So, when you hear the Law of God: do NOT ignore the warning, just because of the feet that bring it, or the mouth! The fitting use of the LAW is to put us on the scale, tell us how far off ideal we are, and then make us face that bracing truth! That is what the Lord means with His call to 'repent!'

Especially since we have been baptized at His authority now! What have we to fear?! We can take any diagnosis of the Law: How firm is your attachment to your Father above? How glad is the next man to see your feet moving his way?

For, baptized into the Kingdom of King Jesus, we know who belongs in His realm! Mark 15 has the mockery repeated some half dozen times: ‘So, THIS is the King of the Jews, the King of Israel! On the cross! Beauty of a King! Fitting throne and crown! And what a court, the two dying next you!’

But for those Jesus’ Holy Spirit calls to follow Him and to learn from Him and to BE His—there could not be a more beautiful scene recorded, than that ugliest of all tableaux. For the crucifixion of God-in-the-flesh, and His nice hailing there as King tears to shreds any gap that has stood between our Maker and us. And when we hear the Law and need to repent—my dear people, that’s...ALL...that...THAT...is: A call to see what we are, what we’ve done, where our plans are NOT full of beauty, and then RUN the other way!

With all boldness and confidence! For we know the place that HEAVEN calls fitting for the Law: NOT to make us despair; NOT to drive us to a beauty competition and its attendant hypocrisy; but simply to leave us crying out as the liturgy teaches us so beautifully, that even I will one day learn it: Lord, all you can do with people like us is to throw us a bone! In other words, have mercy on US!

For our confidence before the God WE...CANNOT...KNOW, is that HE has come all the way to us! THAT is the difference between God and idols, the Living One and all made up fantasies, Creator over against warped Creation!

WHO...saw...THIS...coming?! That despite the most long-suffering work the Lord of Israel made with His people of old, Israel; and despite their utter rejection by Him and punishment for proving that all they had in them was the NEGATION of love toward Him or to any other people—

His New Word, His New Creation, His New THING, would be to grab hold of those who had every advantage and STILL wasted it all—and call them the apple of His eye!

Who saw THAT coming?! That God would NOT wait to change the subjects of His Kingdom, FINALLY to find those proper and suitable enough for HIM! NO!

Instead, He changed...His Kingdom! He sent a New King! One NO...ONE... could expect!

The One Who—when all others were confessing their sins in the River Jordan, He jumped right in! Lovely!

The One Who made His three closest advisors: Peter the denier; and James and John, ladder climbers if there ever were, causing strife among the original twelve.

These three—restored after His rising, would be prominent at the birth of the Church, for the reason we should ALL rejoice and put on beautiful garments: to glorify the Gospel of Jesus Christ! If heaven calls THESE GUYS the best and most fitting, beautiful feet to carry the heraldic proclamation of a kingdom of God NO MAN could have looked for—then who among us does heaven call repulsive?!

Maybe Jonah! You know his story. Jonah's problem was NOT his LACK of faith in God or His Word. Just the OPPOSITE!

Jonah did not want to call the enemy of God's people, Nineveh, to repentance. For Jonah 'Just KNEW!' that God's Word would do its work, and He would—PREDICTABLY!—turn away from His wrath. GOD would repent with SINCERITY—while the Ninevites were just making a show to save themselves!

How did Jonah know that? For Jonah knew his own heart!

We've got plenty now, my friends, for this week's good works and prayers and devotion and repentance and faith, don't we?!

FORGET beauty in the eye of the beholder! FORGET prejudice and personal taste!

When the LAW judges the next man WAY out of favor with heaven—you and I have learned from the Holy

Spirit of Jesus to know that THERE—in THAT MAN—
God can find someone JUST...RIGHT! A man to forgive!
A woman to bear with! A child to correct with Spirit-born
gentleness.

AND, my dear ones:

This call to repentance gives us another great gift! To
know for certain those things that are NOT fitting, beautiful
in the eyes of God—and so, not worth OUR bother either:

Superiority.

Judging.

Despair.

Guilt.

Envy.

Religious preening.

Delusion.

Leaving the LAST word about us and God, or ANY MAN and God in US or IN...THAT...MAN!

The gift of our Baptism into Christ! That when everything in us says ‘yuck’ about the next poor man, we still do not turn away. But instead, we’re ATTRACTED! “Lord, have mercy on us!”

Your God, your Father, your King and your Holy Spirit say over that faith, that love, that hope: **Beautiful**, in the Name of Jesus. Amen!