

**Sunday, January 21, 2024 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church**  
**Bible Study**  
**Third Sunday After the Epiphany**  
**“A Second Time”**  
**Jonah 3:1-5, 10 and Mark 1:14-20**

Open with a word of prayer

**Gathering Time** (5-10 minutes). Have participants answer: “Have you ever experienced God’s call to a specific ministry or mission?”

**Jonah 3:1-5, 10 Context.** The book of Jonah tells the story of an unwilling prophet whom God has sent to proclaim judgment upon Israel’s enemies in the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. When Jonah gets his call, he immediately takes off in the opposite direction. He boards a boat at the Mediterranean seaport of Joppa that is bound for the westernmost shores of the sea. But God won’t let him get away: he brings a storm upon the sea that the sailors are unable to resist. In a last ditch attempt to avoid God’s call, he nearly begs the sailors to throw him into the sea as an offering to appease God and calm the waters, and they oblige him. But even there, Jonah can’t get away from God: by means of a large fish – who swallows Jonah – God brings Jonah back to the shore. And so, with this week’s reading, the story begins again. A philological note: the Hebrew word for “overthrown” in the reading is related to the word that means “repent.” Coincidence? Probably not.

**Mark 1:14-20 Context.** This week’s reading gives Mark’s account of the beginning of Jesus’ preaching and the call of his first disciples, two pairs of brothers, Simon and Andrew, James and John. Like John the baptizer, Jesus preaches repentance but he also preached the good news of God’s reign. His first disciples were not rich, but they were not poor. Leaving their former lives behind represented a real reorganization of the material well-being of their families.

**Read Jonah 3:1-5, 10 and Mark 1:14-20**

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

**Read Jonah 3:1-5, 10 and Mark 1:14-20 again -**

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Why did God send Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh?
- Why is it essential for those in power to listen to and respond to God’s message?

- What are God’s prophets and prophetesses telling us at this time? What is the collective response these times call for? [For example, God calls us to repent from the many ways we keep destroying God’s creation and to take communal measures to stop the destruction.]
- *“The real call of the book of Jonah is to be more like the God who sent him; the one who believes in second chances; the one who doesn’t give up issuing the invitation, even when the response isn’t what was hoped.”* What does it mean for people of faith who are in the business of making disciples who make disciples?
- Simon and Andrew immediately left their nets and followed Jesus (Mark 1:18). Have you ever left something behind to follow Jesus? Is there anything you need to leave behind to respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow him now?

### **Closing Reflection Question**

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

**Prayer** (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

**Sending Forth** (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Dear God, thank you for not giving up on us and repeatedly extending your grace and mercy toward us. Please help us share the grace we have freely received from you. **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord’s Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven  
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.