

Signs and Messages

February 8, 2026

Jonah 3:1-10, Luke 11:29-54

Both of our readings this morning consider the topics of signs and messages. Jonah was a prophet that was scared of the Lord and scared of the people of the city Nineveh, the place Jonah was being sent to share the message of God. In the beginning, Jonah thought he could run away from God and therefore not have to share the message of doom and destruction from God. God sent Jonah signs of a dangerous storm, and being sent to the belly of a large fish. Without relaying the whole story of Jonah, the basic message is, that we can't run from God, and God found Jonah and punished him. Jonah prayed to the Lord, admitting his faults, and begged for forgiveness. God forgave and also gave Jonah a second chance to finish what had been initially asked of him. He goes to Nineveh and tells the people that they had forty days before they would be overthrown. The people took this message to heart and did everything they knew how to do, to change their evil ways. They proclaimed a fast and everyone put on sack cloth; they did things to atone for their bad deeds, and evil ways. The king proclaimed that humans had to wear sack cloth, and had to abstain from eating, and abstaining from food also included all animals as well. This part of the story ends with God seeing that the people of Nineveh were honestly doing everything they could to change their evil ways, and God was impressed and did not have the people of this city overthrown.

In the second reading this morning, in Luke, we see a different side of Jesus. Usually we read of the calm, quiet, and gentle Jesus, sharing kind, and loving messages. But today we see an angry Jesus who is condemning the Pharisees and the lawyers. He tells them, straight out, that "this generation is an evil generation", and that as Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so Jesus was a sign to the people within the generation he was talking to. Jesus condemns the

Pharisees for practicing the ceremonial rituals, for valuing their seats of honour in the synagogues and the respect they are afforded in the marketplace, but they neglected to practice justice and love of God and of others. Jesus also speaks harshly to the lawyers, saying that they do more to burden people than relieving their burdens. Jesus accuses their ancestors of killing prophets and building tombs. He also accused the lawyers of having "...taken away the key to knowledge..." Jesus told them that their generation was being "...charged with the blood of all prophets shed since the foundation of the world".

Now the message Jesus shares with the Pharisees and lawyers was not received in the same way Jonah's message was received by the people and the king of Nineveh. The people and king of Nineveh acknowledged and took ownership of their evil ways and did things to show God they had changed and wouldn't be practicing their old evil ways in the future. Although the things Jesus was accusing the Pharisees and lawyers of were true, the Pharisees and lawyers didn't see this as warning, they saw Jesus as being rude, overstepping his boundaries, and being disrespectful to them. This angered them to the point they would lay in wait for Jesus to say or do something they could hold against him. The Pharisees and lawyers did nothing to address their evil ways that Jesus had pointed out to them. They did not see Jesus as a sign, nor did they heed the message from Jesus.

Will we recognize the signs that are being sent our way, and will we be willing to respond to a message, or messages, that impinge on our way of life, our standing in community we have become accustomed to, that we have come to accept as the norm?

As I share this next section, I note that I am reading Bonnies message and share this, her story as written:

In my personal journey with the Holy Mystery, God, I have been afforded many signs, and messages that I either hadn't recognized, until years later, or had seen and heard, but just ignored, out of my own doubt and fears. I was in ministry

almost 37 years when I finally found the courage to respond to what I was being called to, and that was to Order of Ministry. I spent so many years doubting and denying my ability to be a minister. I served the Downtown Chaplaincy/Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry (RAPM) for many years but left the faith-based side of ministry to my teammates (Bob Gay, and Peter Gilmer). I was afraid to do pulpit work, yet I could do public speaking anywhere, anytime on social justice and human rights issues. I told myself that I wasn't doing Pastoral Care, I was counselling people. When Peter and I started working together we were called Staff Associates, when that title was removed, we I were grandfathered into the title of Designated Lay Ministers, or DLM's. Neither of us realized what this title really entailed. When I did understand what we could and should do, I figured I needed to learn how to work from the pulpit, how to create a worship service, write my own prayers, so I took the Licensed Lay Worship Leader course, and other online theological courses. So, I started creating services and officiating Sunday services, doing funerals, and weddings. So, now I was able to do the faith-based work of RAPM. Then I retired but continued on as the Voluntary Associate Minister (VAM), for Knox Metropolitan Church.

A couple of years into my retirement the decision was made that DLM's, if they chose, could be Ordained or Commissioned, after they went through the interview process to figure out what stream of ministry, Ordained, or Diaconal, they were being called to. This was not something I considered because I was retired. And, what made me think I had what it took to be an Ordained or Diaconal Minister? Folks kept asking me if I was considering it, and I kept telling them I am retired. I was asked so many times that one day I thought maybe I should just ask the question, "is it possible"? So, I called Regional Council Office and was told my retirement didn't exclude me. It was still something I had to think about but finally I came to the conclusion, I would give it a try. Boy, was I surprised when I made it through the interview process. What was surprising for me though was, after a time of discernment, that I was being called to Ordination

rather than Diaconal Ministry. So, I struggled with this, because I had entered into this discernment process believing I would be requesting Commissioning as A Diaconal Minister, not Ordination. Then I had to put my name out for a Call or Appointment. I had an interview with Heritage and St. Andrew's collaborative. I didn't think the interview went well and after time went by, I figured I was mistaken and wasn't being called into the Order of Ministry. When Cindy Dorr called, to tell me I was to be the new minister of Heritage and St. Andrew's United Churches, I honestly thought she was calling to say, "thank you, but". Now that I look back at the signs I missed and ignored, I realize that I wasted so much time in fear and doubt. Trust in God, for we will not be asked to do more than we are capable of. Trust in the Holy Mystery, God, and if you are being trusted by God, TRUST IN YOURSELF.

Watch for the signs, listen for the messages, and answer God's call sooner than later. Our faith will see us through all challenges. And with that may all God's children say Amen.