



SERMONS THAT WORK

Epiphany 3 Year B

Arrested

[RCL] Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:6-14; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

“After John was arrested.”

This line should arrest us where we stand. John’s arrest happens just moments after John the Baptizer baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River and Jesus is driven into the wilderness to be tested by the Devil.

And then John is arrested. Arrested. He’s stopped in his tracks. That’s what the word “arrest” means—to be stopped.

An arrest on the side of the highway gets our attention. Cars slow down and sometimes stop to see who it is being arrested. An arrest makes the news if it’s a high-profile person. Everyone stops to see who’s been nabbed. An arrest not only stops the person arrested, it stops everyone.

After John was arrested.

We were arrested.

We were stopped, arrested by this news. An order was issued from Herod to his soldiers to go arrest John the Baptist. The movement John started in the desert—a movement of confession, repentance, and renewal by baptism came to a sudden stop.

After John was arrested, we were devastated.

John had been preaching repentance for all, from the least to the greatest. Messages of repentance in our day are often a call to join a new church or religion, but John was not calling them to join a new church or religion. He was calling his people to return to the covenant of Justice and Mercy. He was inviting them to come home.

And we heard this message in Advent, too—this invitation to come home to God. Did we? Did we respond? Did we renew our trust in God’s faithfulness? Did we start that journey toward home?

And now, after John was arrested, we don’t know where home is.

But then we remembered John's message. We remembered how he told us the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth was coming—is coming.

And Jesus is here.

After John was arrested, "Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God."

John's arrest was a huge blow to his followers and disciples. They lost so much when John was arrested by an insecure and vindictive tyrant, Herod. But there, in this gaping hole, steps Jesus, proclaiming the good news of God.

And this is the good news for us today. The good news is found in the gaping holes of life, in the disappointments, in the blows and losses, in the sadness and grief. The good news is always found in these moments, at the eleventh hour, when all hope is lost. This is when we are ready to receive good news.

This is when Jesus comes to us, proclaiming the good news of God.

Jesus' life, as recorded in the Gospel of Mark, follows this pattern of life, death, and resurrection. After John was arrested, we died a little, and then Jesus came with good news. This pattern will play out when Jesus goes to the cross at the end of Mark's Gospel, too.

And this pattern will play out in your life, and our life together.

After John was arrested, we heard the good news. After our dreams had died, we heard about new life, new dreams.

Jesus is very clear in his message, that we are to repent and believe. We are to come home to the God who loves us and announces a kingdom of love and peace. But this kingdom only comes after John is arrested, after our dreams die.

And Jesus, who comes to us after John is arrested, comes to us in our fishing boats.

Jesus walks along the Sea of Galilee and sees Simon and Andrew, James and John fishing, so he calls them to follow him.

And they do follow him.

In this account, it never says why these disciples leave their fishing boats and their fishing nets and follow Jesus. Why would these young men leave their family businesses and follow this wandering rabbi, who is just getting started himself?

Mark doesn't tell us. He leaves that as a mystery.

After John was arrested, we followed Jesus.

The juxtaposition in the text of John's arrest and these disciples following Jesus is not a mere coincidence. It is the very heart of the good news—the gospel Jesus is preaching. It is in the midst of loss and heartache that we find hope and purpose in Jesus.

And maybe we aren't quite sure why we are here today, to gather as followers of Jesus; we are not always sure of our motives for doing anything. But like those disciples in their fishing boats, something about Jesus' call to us made sense—it resonated with us. Like many formative events in life, it's a bit of a mystery. We don't fully know how or why a relationship started. All we know is that it did indeed start, that it continues, and that it gives us hope for the future.

So, come and follow Jesus. Come and fish for people with the good news.

David W. Peters is the author of two books, Death Letter (Tactical 16 Press) and Post-Traumatic God (Morehouse, 2016). He is the founder of the Episcopal Veterans Fellowship and serves as the Associate Rector at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Austin, Tex.