

Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey
Weekly Witness | January 19, 2018

In the selected readings for the season of Epiphany, Old Testament tales of the calling of prophets are paired with the stories of how Jesus called his first disciples. This Sunday, we hear a familiar lesson of Simon, Andrew, James, and John dropping their fishing nets to follow Jesus when he stands on the shore and calls them to join him. They make it seem so easy; the text from Mark describes how the four men immediately drop everything to follow Jesus, becoming “fishers of people.”

But lest we think that leaving our worldly lives behind is so easy when God calls upon us, we also read selections from Jonah’s story. When read in its entirety, the book of Jonah gives a much more humbling depiction of the barriers we create to truly listening for the word of God. We see in Jonah a man who resisted God’s call to go outside of his comfort zone, he exerted minimal effort by only going into the city of Ninevah a bit, not the whole three days journey across it, then grumbled when God acted with grace and love for people whom Jonah himself could not forgive.

Some days, we may feel our baptismal callings to strive for justice and peace in the world make it easy to drop everything and mobilize. But on many others, we may find ourselves dragging our feet a bit like Jonah. Letting go of “first-world problems” to pay full attention to the ways we can serve our neighbors and stand alongside those with lived experience of poverty advocating for justice is not always as simple as dropping our to-do lists and following this higher call. We are pulled in so many different directions each day, so how do find the courage to follow Christ with fullness of heart?

[For Such a Time](#) is a commitment for each of us to [pray, fast, and act](#) on the 21st of each month through December 2018 and is a helpful tool for us to remember to listen to God’s call and take action. Presiding Bishop Michael Curry of the Episcopal Church and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton of the ELCA invite us to commit to pray, fast, and act to remember those in poverty and the challenges they face, and then to do something about it.

This Sunday, January 21, we are asked to #PrayFastAct for [anti-poverty programs](#) and our neighbors effected by them. This is extremely timely as budget discussions continue in Washington. We encourage you and your congregations to take part in the movement:

1. **PRAY** | Pray for those trapped in cyclical poverty and for our nation to heed Christ’s call to adequately care for those in need. Consider adding petitions to your prayers of the people or invite members of your congregation to reflect on this Sunday’s lessons with a particular lens of justice.

2. **FAST** | Fast to remember the millions of Americans who, even with jobs and public assistance, are still unable to feed their families, and struggle to afford retirement or medical care. Use #PrayFastAct on social media and share a picture of a dinner place setting with the reason you are fasting.

3. **ACT** | Read this [one-pager](#) on the three most commonly discussed anti-poverty programs. Reach out to your representatives to remind them that when they vote on budgets, they should be voting for better lives for all of their constituents.