

Epiphany 3B
Peace, Seattle
January 25, 2015
Jonah 3:1-10, Mark 1:14-20

THE CENTRIPETAL/CENTRIFUGAL RHYTHM OF GOD'S CALL

The staccato sound Zakir Hussain's fingers make as they flail upon the tabla drum seems to defy the laws of physics.

The fact is, the beginning of his musical life began in India when he was just 2 days old.¹

"I was brought home from the hospital," he recalls. [And] The tradition is that the son is handed to the father, and then the father [recites] a prayer in his son's ear, putting him on his way.

My father, when he took me in his arms, instead of reciting prayer, sang rhythms in my ear.

And my mother was very upset and said, 'Why are you doing this?'

And [my father] said, 'Because this is my prayer.' "

His father's prayer that he would carry on the tabla legacy was heard.²

At age seven, Zakir was asked by his father Alla if he was ready to learn the tabla for real.

He answered yes, and so every night for the next four years his father woke him at 2:30am and began sharing the instrument's long tradition, its great masters, and its intricate rhythms.

"[to be woken so early] didn't matter to me" says Zakir. "I was so happy...to be in his presence was great."

You might say he was called.

The topic today is CALL and it's a timely one as we fill out the nominations ballot for today's annual meeting! Our texts give us two examples.

The first is Jonah, whom God called not once but twice. The first time Jonah ran the other way. But after three days in the belly of a fish, Jonah got a second chance & reluctantly he said YES.

The second example of call comes from our gospel. Jesus begins his public ministry on the shores of Galilee by calling four fisherman—Simon & Andrew, James & John—to his side. And without hesitating they leave the world they've known behind and turn to follow him.

We could say there are two basic movements involved in any SACRED CALL to follow:

The first is CENTRIPETAL and the second is CENTRIFUGAL.

- One moves us INWARD toward the center—the centripetal force pulling us in as if by gravity.
- The other moves us OUTWARD from the center, the centrifugal force pushing us toward the world.

Two movements, like breathing: IN...OUT... IN...OUT. One can't exist without the other.

¹ Excerpts for this story are taken from an interview of Zakir Hussain by NPR's David Green, which aired on Morning Edition on January 8, 2015. © 2015 NPR.
Link: <http://www.npr.org/2015/01/08/375637915/the-tabla-master-who-jammed-with-the-grateful-dead>

² To watch Zakir and Alla playing together, follow this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?x-yt-ts=1421914688&x-yt-cl=84503534&v=49HJyqAtyMM#t=192>

Tabla player Zakir Hussain was drawn to first go inward and become a disciple of his father's tradition. But as his playing matured he learned other rhythms from around the globe and was drawn outward to experiment and collaborate with non-Indian musicians.

[GESTURES...] Cen-tri-pe-tal...Cen-tri-fu-gal. In...out.

Jonah tried to resist the gravitational pull of God's call; to no avail.

Then he tried to resist the propulsive power of God's proclamation—again, to no avail.

(If you read the whole story carefully, he does the absolute minimum to fulfill the letter of his Call)

God managed to use Jonah in spite of himself.

As far as Simon & Andrew, James & John are concerned, this early in Mark's gospel the jury is still out. But we know this much—Jesus has called them and they have followed.

FOLLOW ME, (inward) AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISH FOR OTHERS (outward).

Our texts give two examples for responding to God's call. But I'd like to talk about a third way. Not a way between those two poles of resistance and acceptance, but alongside them.

Because the world most of us inhabit is one in which we can't quite imagine setting down our nets and walking away.

- We're raising and supporting families;
- or we're going to school and taking steps toward a future for ourselves;
- or we're trying to make our social security and savings stretch enough to cover our needs and the things that matter to us.

For those of us who find ourselves in this space, the THIRD WAY of responding to God's call is not about leaving the life we know behind, but rather **STAYING IN IT...**

It's about SEEING the vocations and roles we inhabit—as parent, spouse, worker, student, daughter, son, neighbor, and so on—as the **SACRED ARENAS in which Christ is calling us to serve; arenas which are transformed as Christ comes into those spaces and inhabits them with us.**

By breathing with us—IN...OUT...IN...OUT—Christ helps us see that following him doesn't have to mean leaving everything we know behind; it can mean embracing what we know—what's been entrusted to us—ever more deeply and dearly, knowing that this is our calling.

There was a time in Zakir Hussain's life when new kinds of music—especially the growing rock scene—tempted him to forsake the tabla for a drum set. Then one day he found himself working with Beatles star George Harrison on a sitar record. He told Harrison about his dream to be a rock drummer and Harrison said:

Look. You want to play drums, but the reason you're sitting next to me is because you represent a culture I really adore, and that's what you bring to this table. If you want to be just one of the thousand and be somebody that you are not, that's entirely up to you. But if you want to take all these incredible [drummers and influences] you've experienced—and make them part of your music, just imagine how unique your music will be.³

The call to fully inhabit the gifts and relationships to which Christ has called us—this is the Third Way.

³ From interview with David Green, cited above. To see an incredible mini-concert that includes Hussain with banjo master Bela Fleck and bassist Edgar Meyer, follow this LINK: <http://www.npr.org/2010/07/26/128652297/bela-fleck-edgar-meyer-zakir-hussain-tiny-desk-concert>

These Sunday mornings are times for sharing the stories of how the call—our call—is going, and of being reminded how we all fit into the larger story, the marvelous vibe through which God moves us all toward wholeness and toward resurrection.

Our culture says that the choices we make as individuals is the be all and end all.

But as Christ gathers us in this morning we are reminded that being in community is an indispensable touchstone for living out our calling...

...that we are not meant to live solitary lives—or someone else's life—but to be gathered with Peter & Andrew, James & John—even with reluctant Jonah—around Jesus and the way of life he offers in the word, the water, and the meal.

When we answer his call to meet him here, then all the other stuff—including the decisions and commitments we'll make when we meet downstairs today—all this other stuff begins to make sense in a new way.

For we see it as the BREATHING OUT, the EXHALING, the CENTRIFUGAL FORCE pushing us outward as a church, a community, now sent out for the life of the world.

Amen.