“Chicken Soup for Salvation”

Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

There is nothing quite like homemade chicken soup. I’ve always known this, but came to realize how much so a couple of weeks ago when I was struggling with a nasty cold. I needed some Jewish penicillin bad but the store-bought stuff just wasn’t going to do; I needed prescription strength chicken soup that can only be made at home. Chicken soup can be very simple to make but to make a REALLY good and effective one, takes a little bit of more time, preparation and Love as any mother will tell you. And this is exactly what this cold needed.

So, we went to the store and gathered all of the ingredients: a whole chicken, onions, carrots, celery and garlic for the soup itself and flour and eggs for the noodles: simple, non-fancy ingredients. We then hurried back to our kitchen apothecary and began to prepare the cure for this seemingly not-so-common cold. Tara and Tommy made noodles from scratch while I de-boned the chicken and roasted the meat and the bones for added flavor and potency. I then cut up the vegetables while Veronica supervised. After about two and a half hours of preparation we were finally ready to actually make the soup which only took about another 30 minutes to cook and finish completely. This simple soup, made from simple ingredients selectively chosen, trimmed and prepared with love and care became the perfect remedy for what ailed me.

Interestingly, I was thinking about today’s readings as we were preparing the soup. I often read the Readings on which I am going to preach, a couple of weeks in advanced so they can percolate or simmer over time. As such, it occurred to me, out of delirium or hunger, that a very similar thing is happening in our Gospel today. Jesus goes out around Galilee, gathers and chooses simple, seemingly ordinary people in which to trim
and prepare with Love and care to be a part of His mission and become the perfect remedy and antidote for sin and death in the world:  The Apostles.

In today’s gospel, Jesus begins to preach that the Kingdom of God is at hand. “The time is fulfilled,” he says, “repent and believe in the gospel.”  As such it is time to call and gather those that he has chosen to aid in His mission.  He doesn’t call the Pharisees, he doesn’t call out to the priests, the scribes or anyone else well educated in Jewish Law or Scripture.  Instead he calls and gathers the onions, carrots, celery and chickens, of the area, if you will.  Jesus seeks out and uses simple and otherwise ordinary folks who nonetheless inherently had something significant and important to offer to this mission.  The ancient Church Father Eusebius puts it this way, “[Jesus] thought good to use the most unsophisticated and common people as ministers of his own design.  Maybe God just wanted to work in the most unlikely way.”

We see this in our First Reading from the Book of Jonah as well.  God calls the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh to warn the people there to repent and return to God lest they are destroyed.  Jonah, who is a personification of the chosen people, was an unlikely and even more unwilling prophet, servant and messenger of God.  This reading occurs right after Jonah is refunded onto the shore from the belly of the giant fish after trying to flee from God.  The fear and reluctance that Jonah showed prior to his three-day, sojourn in the stomach of the great fish was replaced by the power of God working through the Spirit of God within him.

Likewise, the Apostles in our Gospel today are so compelled by the presence of God in their midst, in the person of Jesus, that they leave everything to follow him.  WHY?  The power of the Spirit motivated them to look beyond their familiar, daily and routine lives to something longed for yet altogether unfamiliar.  The potential within them was about to be unleashed and guided by the prompting of the divine.

And although we can see that the response of Jonah and the Apostles to the call of God to do His will is very different, the mission was more or less the same and fulfillment of that mission in both cases was completely guided by the Spirit of God.  This is what is being communicated to us today.  We have a tendency to think that we have to be extraordinary in some way or heroic to do the will of God in our world.  Like Jonah and the Apostles, we don’t always seem like anyone special or particularly well suited for doing the work of
Christ here on earth. That’s not the case! \textit{WE ARE}, precisely because of our baptism. All we need to do is say “yes” and reaffirm the invitation that we all received in our baptism. It is God who works in and through us and Jonah and the Apostles, that is the source and reason for success. If we take the time to look with objective eyes at Jonah and the Apostles and what they accomplished, we will see that the importance of their role lies in their willingness to answer the call of God, not their ability to fulfill it, God takes care of that. We are simply asked to accept the call and be willing to allow Christ’s work and the Father’s will to animate us through the Holy Spirit. It is the \textit{Holy Spirit} that dwells within each and every one of us motivating, inspiring, guiding and attempting to extract all of the goodness that we have to offer. Like a pot of chicken soup, all of the simple ingredients, properly prepared, contribute to its overall goodness and effectiveness. And we are called to be the simple ingredients: the tear jerking onions, the sweet carrots, the effervescent celery, the loud and bold garlic and even the chickens that are prepared lovingly and purposefully by the Divine Cook and Alchemist. In this way, we become the key ingredients that collectively become the remedy that heals what ails this world. We are called, like the Apostles before us, to be the simple components God uses to usher in His Kingdom by allowing Him to make us into the “Chicken Soup of Salvation”.