

Written Copy: Jonah 3:10-4:4 "Do You Do Well to be Angry?"

3rd Sunday @ Epiphany

Sunday, January 24th, 2021

Text: Jonah 3:10-4:4

¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. ¹But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ²And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."⁴ And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

The text's intent

God does not look to the worthiness of the individual when it comes to sending His Gospel Message, or His work to move people to repentance. None are worthy. If the LORD sees fit to extend His grace and forgiveness to someone, we the Church, and individual members of it, should be ready and willing to do likewise. We are called to forgive just as Christ forgives us, undeserved grace and forgiveness.

The text's mood/emotional force

Law: Jonah was willing to enjoy and benefit from God's undeserved grace but unwilling to be His means to share that undeserved grace with those he deemed unworthy of it. He was unwilling to love others unconditionally as God loves others.

Gospel: The LORD loves all people and desires that all come to know Him as the loving, forgiving, saving God that He is. HE is slow to anger, instead offering grace as He did with Nineveh granting them 40 days to repent. He is the God that works miraculously to bring people to faith, even a whole nation. He is the God who is patient, even with Jonah, reaching down to call Him back to have the same love and mercy for Nineveh as God had shown Jonah himself.

Focus Statement:

None of us are worthy of the LORD's gracious forgiveness and yet we receive it in abundance. The LORD has worked in your life with patience, undeserved grace and mercy. He continues to forgive you even as you struggle to forgive others. The power to forgive others comes only from Him and His love as He impresses upon you what a great and gracious gift you have in Christ: forgiveness, salvation, eternal life.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

While we cherish the free gift of grace that is poured out to us we don't extend that same gift to those who have angered us, or who we see as being unworthy of it because of who they are or the differences of opinion they hold. When we do "forgive" them it is conditional: "I forgive you, but..." which is not really forgiveness at all

What the hearer should do as a result:

Examine your life for all those whom you struggle to forgive or forgive with conditions. Consider the amazing gift you have received in the continuous cleansing of baptism and seek to be the LORD's means to share His undeserved grace and mercy with others, especially those you don't feel deserve it, by Him changing your heart and mind to be like His.

Subject Sentence: All are undeserving of grace, our enemies and us

Introduction: Both Calls of Jonah and His Reaction

How many of you know the story of “Jonah in the Belly of the Whale?” It used to be a favorite story for Sunday School study. But this past week as I did some of my visitation, I found that this Bible Story is not as well known as I thought it might be. It actually should be called “Jonah in the Belly of a Great Fish”, since the word “whale” does not appear in Scripture and comes from a mistranslation in the King James Version. So allow me to fill in those of you who are unfamiliar with the story. And for those of you who’ve heard it before, let me renew your acquaintance with it. Also, for the sake of dramatic effect, please allow me some liberty in my retelling of the tale.

It begins with Jonah, a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, doing his prophetic work, studying God’s Word and awaiting a message from the LORD. And then it comes with the LORD calling “Jonah!” “Yes LORD, here I am.” “Jonah: get up and go to the city of Nineveh and proclaim this message: that their evil works have come before my eyes and I will tolerate them no longer.” Jonah replies, “Nineveh? Surely LORD, you don’t mean Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrians, that evil and brutal nation! The nation that is growing in power and is becoming a threat to your people Israel. They are the enemy LORD! Surely, they deserve Your punishment, but not Your warning.” The LORD responds, “Yes, I do mean that great city of Nineveh, great in size, and great in its importance in my eyes. I am commanding you as my prophet to go there and preach the message that I tell you to preach.” Jonah responds, “OK LORD, but, look over there, is that Elvis?” And Jonah takes off on a run.

Jonah runs to the seaport of Joppa and climbs aboard a Phoenician cargo ship heading in the exact opposite direction that the LORD had commanded him to go. It is heading to Tarshish, which many Biblical Scholars believe was a Phoenician port city at the tip of what is now Spain. It would’ve been considered at that time the edge of the known world. Tired from his hurried journey to get out of town, stressed over God’s call for him to go to the enemy, perhaps dealing with guilt over his disobedience of God’s command, and a little fearful over what might happen, Jonah disappears below to escape reality in sleep.

His sleep is interrupted by the captain of the ship commanding Jonah wake up and pray to his God. A fierce storm had suddenly come up and it threatened to capsize the boat. Each sailor was praying to their own god. Of course their gods were all worthless idols who could do nothing. When this didn’t help, they decided to cast lots to figure out whose god was responsible for their dire predicament. And the lot fell to Jonah. Jonah must now confess that His God is in fact the one and only God, the LORD God, maker of heaven and earth. And the LORD God is angry at Jonah for disobeying Him and trying to run away from Him. Jonah tells them, “If you want to save yourself and the ship, then you must throw me overboard. But these sailors try to do everything else to save themselves, throwing cargo overboard, and trying to row back to shore, but all these things fail.

Finally the turn and pray to Jonah’s God, the LORD God, **(Jonah 1:14-16)** ¹⁴ **Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you."** ¹⁵ **So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.** ¹⁶ **Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made**

vows. They are saying, “We recognize you as the only God. We will do what your prophet says, if it is Your will. Only don’t accuse us of murder by throwing him overboard. We repent of our sinful disbelief and seek to serve You alone in obedience”. Their actions done in repentant faith moves the LORD to save them from certain death. But their actions will most certainly condemn Jonah to his own death. Yet Jonah willingly goes, confessing that this is what he deserves for disobeying the LORD as he has. And as soon as Jonah hits the water, the storm stops. With the newfound faith that has been worked in their hearts, these sailors praise and worship the LORD God with thanksgiving for giving them back their lives.

As Jonah sinks down into the water depths and the seaweed begins to entangle about him, he realizes and confesses that this is the fate he deserved. While he certainly did deserve it, it’s not the fate the LORD has chosen for him. In a supernatural act of mercy, one no one would expect, not even Jonah, the LORD sends a great fish to provide for Jonah’s rescue by swallowing him whole. And there in the fish’s belly, Jonah spends three days and nights. He spends it by turning back in faith to the LORD, recognizing the undeserved grace and salvation the LORD has shown him. His situation is hardly ideal, yet he sings songs of praise and thanksgiving to the LORD. And the LORD responds to Jonah’s repentant change of heart by moving the fish to regurgitate him back up onto the land, perhaps not far from where he set sail from.

Back on land the LORD graciously restores the formerly disobedient Jonah to his prophetic calling. **(Jonah 3:1-2) ¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you."** This time Jonah obeys and heads out on the 600-mile journey to reach Nineveh. Nineveh is a sprawling metropolis including the city proper and all the outlying towns and villages. It takes Jonah three days just to walk from one end to the other. Jonah walks one day’s worth of the journey and begins to proclaim the message from the LORD. He proclaims the law by saying: “Because of all the evil that you have done in the eyes of the LORD God your city will be destroyed.” The Gospel portion had to do with the forty days that the LORD was giving them. We don’t have any record of any other Gospel proclamation that Jonah may have shared. But his entire existence, the fact that he was standing there at all, was a testament to the forgiveness and grace that is the work the LORD loves to do, far more than to kill and to destroy. And Jonah, having spent 3 days and nights surrounded by the digestive juices of this great fish, may have showed evidence in the way he looked that he had been a part of the powerful supernatural saving power of the LORD. Perhaps he told them the story of why he looked as he did.

Whatever means or other message the LORD used, He did a miraculous work that rivaled the work He had done in saving and working repentance in those sailors, as well as in Jonah. He worked repentance in the heart of each and every person in Nineveh from the greatest to the least. **(Jonah 3:5) And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.** These evil, sinful, wicked people, known for their brutal and violent behavior as well as their degrading and wicked worship practices to their false gods, every single one of them repented of their sinfulness and turned in faith to the God of Jonah. They demonstrated

their change of heart in their actions by taking off their clothes of comfort and putting on the rough and itchy sackcloth, and called on each other to fast, to forgo thoughts of pleasing themselves and instead lifted up prayers to Jonah's God. Even the King and his nobles joined in. And the King issuing a proclamation for all Nineveh to follow suit.

The LORD's reaction to Nineveh's Repentance vs. Jonah's

They believed the LORD God to be the one and only God capable of punishing them with destruction. But they now also believed something else about Him. **Jonah 3:9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.**" They are emboldened to cry out to Him for mercy because they believe Him to be a loving and merciful God. Their knowledge of the LORD and their confession of faith match the one Jonah himself gives in **Jonah 4:2 "...you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.**

The Ninevites newfound faith is well founded. It is the same faith that you and I have been given in our baptism. You and I at the start of this service made the same confession as Jonah did when he was swallowed by the great fish, the same confession that the people of Nineveh made when they heard Jonah's proclamation of law. We are poor miserable sinners. We daily disobey our LORD in thought, word, and deed. And try as hard as we might, we cannot escape our sinful condition. Even those good things we try to say and do cannot make up for the sin we commit at other times, because our sins are too many. And even these so-called good works we do are done from a sinful selfish heart, often out of selfish sinful reasons, and not from unselfish love the LORD calls us to have for others. Just like Jonah, and just like the Ninevites, you and I deserve total and eternal destruction from the LORD. We deserve an eternity of suffering and dying, where we desire a final end to it all that never does come. That's what we deserve, but not what the LORD gives us.

Instead He gives us Jesus. He suffered all the punishment and suffering that you and I deserve. The Father poured out upon His Son all that we have earned and deserved so that you and I can be completely and totally forgiven of it all. Jesus willingly took upon Himself all our sins, out of love for you. He died your death so that you would never have to experience the hell of dying eternally. He declares you no longer worthy of total destruction, but instead worthy of life with Him now and eternal life to come. All these He has earned for you and gives to you in His free gift of faith.

And in your baptism, He continues to forgive you, just as He continued to forgive Jonah. He moves you to see the ways you have disobeyed, and then moves you to sorrow over them. And when you confess them to Him, instead of facing a vengeful and wrathful God, you hear His gracious and loving words of forgiveness that are the Absolution. Over and over, time and again in the Gospel Message, the Lord assures you that you stand forgiven, even though you continue to sin. He impresses that forgiveness upon your heart whenever you hear His Gospel message. He comes to you and affirms who He really is to you because of your faith in Christ Jesus. He makes Himself known to you as the **"gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."** Your confession of faith becomes David's confession of faith from **Psalm 62:1-2 ¹ For God alone**

my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. ² He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken.

Do We Do Well to be Angry, Instead of Forgiving?

This is the gracious love and forgiveness Jonah had experienced firsthand. This is the gracious love and forgiveness that He witnessed the LORD share with Nineveh. So he should be rejoicing, right? Instead as we read in **Jonah 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry** to see that the LORD had forgiven Nineveh and relented from His plan to destroy them. So the LORD had a question for him in **Jonah 4:4 And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"** Is your anger good, right, and salutary? Is it the appropriate response for one who himself deserved the punishment due Nineveh,, and like Nineveh did not receive it because of the LORD's gracious love and forgiveness?

The LORD not only asks Jonah that question, but you and I here today as well. Who in your life do you struggle to truly forgive? Who do you secretly wish ill upon? Of whom do you say "I forgive you, but..." We who have been forgiven of all of our sin are called to forgive each other in the same manner as the LORD has forgiven us. With Him there is no "I forgive you, but..." If there is a condition added to that declaration it is not true forgiveness, its not God's type or forgiveness. It's anger against our fellow man that is hidden away, caused by some remark or action that we just can't let go of. Jonah struggled to accept the LORD's grace toward Nineveh because he saw himself as a member of the right people, the right nation, the favored one, and the Ninevites, not being Israelites were undeserving of God's love and forgiveness. In your life who are the Ninevites? Do they go by some racial designation? Do they go by the designation of Democrat or Republican? Do they go by the designation of Biden supporter or Trump supporter? Who is it in your life that makes God ask you **"Do you do well to be angry?"** Do you do well to withhold the forgiveness from them that I have poured out on you?

Conclusion

The LORD still loved Jonah, even though he struggled to forgive the Ninevites as God had forgiven Him. The LORD still loves you and I even though there are those we struggle to forgive in the same manner that Jesus has forgiven us. He comes to you and to me today and asks us **"Do you do well to be angry?"** not as words of anger or hate, but loving words designed to move us to repentance. Forgiving others as Jesus has forgiven us is impossible for us to by ourselves. But it is the miraculous work that His Spirit is at work doing right now in your heart. He comes to you and reminds you of what an awesome gift your faith is, and how deep His love for you is, and how all encompassing His forgiveness is. He reminds you that although you couldn't earn it and don't deserve it, His grace and mercy are yours in superabundance. They are His gift to you, free of charge. And the love that comes with it is what His Spirit uses to move you to begin seeing others as He sees them. To begin to forgive others as He forgives them. Even the Ninevites in your life and mine. Come Lord Jesus and work that miracle of faith in our lives today. Help us to stop running from your call to share Your message of love and forgiveness to our version of Ninevites, and willingly share Your Gospel of grace and forgiveness with all whom we meet. Amen.