

Pastor's Message
November 8, 2020

Hi Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Hope you are all doing well!!

Congregational meetings – There will a virtual (Zoom) congregational meeting on November 29th. At this meeting the 2021 budget will be presented, as well as a slate of nominees for GSELC Church Council members. The second annual congregational meeting will be help virtually after church on December 13th to approve the budget and elect members to the GSELC Church Council.

Food Pantry – The drive-by food pantry distribution will be on Nov 17th from 1:00 to 3:00 on our parking lot. If you are able to help out with Food Distribution, please let me know and I will pass that info onto Brenda. Please share this information with anyone that might be in need or food.

Communion Sundays in November, November 15 (3rd Sunday), November 22 (Christ the King) and November 29 (1st Sunday in Advent)

God's Peace!

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Jonah 1:1-17; 2:1,9; 3:1-10, 4:1-4

A reading from the first four chapters of the book of Jonah.

1 ¹⁻² One day long ago, God's Word came to Jonah: "Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer."

³ But Jonah got up and went the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God. He went down to the port of Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board, joining those going to Tarshish—as far away from God as he could get.

⁴⁻⁶ But God sent a huge storm at sea, the waves towering.

The ship was about to break into pieces. The sailors were terrified. They called out in desperation to their gods. They threw everything they were carrying overboard to lighten the ship.

Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down into the hold of the ship to take a nap. He was sound asleep. The captain came to him and

said, "What's this? Sleeping! Get up! Pray to your god! Maybe your god will see we're in trouble and rescue us."

⁷ Then the sailors said to one another, "Let's get to the bottom of this. Let's draw straws to identify the culprit on this ship who's responsible for this disaster."

So they drew straws. Jonah got the short straw.

⁸ Then they grilled him: "Confess. Why this disaster? What is your work? Where do you come from? What country? What family?"

⁹ He told them, "I'm a Hebrew. I worship God, the God of heaven who made sea and land."

¹⁰ At that, the men were frightened, really frightened, and said, "What on earth have you done!" As Jonah talked, the sailors realized that he was running away from God.

¹¹ They said to him, “What are we going to do with you—to get rid of this storm?” By this time the sea was wild, totally out of control.

¹² Jonah said, “Throw me overboard, into the sea. Then the storm will stop. It’s all my fault. I’m the cause of the storm. Get rid of me and you’ll get rid of the storm.”

¹³ But no. The men tried rowing back to shore. They made no headway. The storm only got worse and worse, wild and raging.

¹⁴ Then they prayed to God, “O God! Don’t let us drown because of this man’s life, and don’t blame us for his death. You are God. Do what you think is best.”

¹⁵ They took Jonah and threw him overboard. Immediately the sea was quieted down.

¹⁶ The sailors were impressed, no longer terrified by the sea, but in awe of God. They worshiped God, offered a sacrifice, and made vows.

¹⁷ Then God assigned a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the fish’s belly three days and nights.

2 ¹⁻⁹ Then Jonah prayed to his God from the belly of the fish.

¹⁰ Then God spoke to the fish, and it vomited up Jonah on the seashore.

3 ¹⁻² Next, God spoke to Jonah a second time: “Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They’re in a bad way and I can’t ignore it any longer.”

³ This time Jonah started off straight for Nineveh, obeying God’s orders to the letter.

Nineveh was a big city, very big—it took three days to walk across it.

⁴ Jonah entered the city, went one day’s walk and preached, “In forty days Nineveh will be smashed.”

⁵ The people of Nineveh listened, and trusted God. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show their repentance. Everyone did it—rich and poor, famous and obscure, leaders and followers.

⁶⁻⁹ When the message reached the king of Nineveh, he got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt.

Then he issued a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, authorized by him and his leaders: “Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal, including your herds and flocks! Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for help to God.

Everyone must turn around, turn back from an evil life and the violent ways that stain their hands. Who knows? Maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us, quit being angry with us and let us live!”

¹⁰ God saw what they had done, that they had turned away from their evil lives. He *did* change

his mind about them. What he said he would do to them he didn't do.

⁴ ¹⁻² Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, “God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!”

³ “So, God, if you won't kill them, kill *me!* I'm better off dead!”

⁴ God said, “What do you have to be angry about?”

The Word of the Lord

C: Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. AMEN

Let us pray:

God of the seas, sky, and land,
When Jonah turned to run from
you, you showed him that
nothing and no one could hide
from your presence. You are in
all things, and you love all
things. Show us the gift of your
presence and help us to carry
your word of compassion and
grace to all the world, in the
name of the one who carried out
your love flawlessly, Jesus
Christ our redeemer. Amen.

And God said to Jonah, what are
you so angry about?

This is one of those Bible stories
that we all know so well, Jonah
disobeys God and runs in the
opposite direction of where God
was sending him. Jonah boards a
ship to a foreign land, where
Jonah thought he would be able

to hide from God. While they are
sailing, God brings on a big
storm.

The other sailors are frightened
and distraught when they find
out that Jonah is the one who
has angered God. Jonah then
throws himself overboard to save
the other sailors and the seas
calm down. Jonah is swallowed
by a big fish, perhaps a whale.

While in the stomach of this big
fish, Jonah repents and prays to
God for forgiveness and God has
mercy on Jonah and commands
the fish to vomit Jonah up on the
shore. TO which I say YUCH!!!

After which Jonah is obedient
and follows God's call. And off to
Nineveh he goes.

And indeed, those are all important details of this story; but what was it about Nineveh that makes this faithful man of God, so desperate that he intentionally defies God and turns away from the God of his ancestors that has time after time proven to be steadfast and faithful to God's chosen people.

First of all, Nineveh was not a safe place for the Hebrews, for Nineveh was the capital of the nation of Assyria, the Hebrews most feared enemy,. The Assyrians were known for their ruthlessness, for their looting and pillaging the Israelite villages and the Israelites lived in constant fear that one day they would suffer ultimate destruction and annihilation at the hands of the Assyrians.

Also, Nineveh was known not only for the violence and destruction that it rained on its' neighbors, but also for its' lawlessness and corruption within the city itself. Nineveh was not only a dangerous place for foreigners, it was a

dangerous place for its' inhabitants.

So, I don't think we can really blame Jonah for trying to avoid this assignment. Really God, you want me to go to Nineveh, this strange and unsavory place, where my very life may be at risk just for being there. And then you want me to tell them that you intend to crush their city in 40 days.

But, after 3 long days and 3 long nights in the belly of the whale praying for forgiveness and then being literally thrown up upon the shore; Jonah choose to honor God's call to go to Nineveh and announce the bad news that the God of Israel is going to crush them to pieces in 40 days.

So, he goes. I am guessing that Jonah is not very optimistic that anything will change, for he believes from what he has seen and heard that they are truly rotten to the core.

But oddly enough, the people of Nineveh listened to what Jonah had told them and began immediately to repent of their sinful ways. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show God that they were indeed humbled and serious about changing their ways. And, everyone did it; the rich and the poor, the famous and the obscure, the leaders and the followers.

When the message reached the king of Nineveh, he got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt.

Then he issued a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, that: “Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal, including your herds and flocks! Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for God to help us.

The king continued to speak saying, “Everyone must turn around, we must turn back from our evil and violent ways.

Who knows? If God sees that we are sincere in our repentance, maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us. Maybe God will quit being angry with us and let us live!”

And that’s exactly what happened, the city of Nineveh and all its inhabitants cleaned up their acts and looked to the God of Israel for mercy and forgiveness.

Wow, what a success story for Jonah. He went to that dangerous city of Nineveh, he shared the awful message that God had given him for them, and surprisingly the people of Nineveh, all of them, heard the message and took the message to heart. They repented. They humbled themselves and they turned from their evil ways. Hallelujah!!!

So, why isn’t Jonah overwhelmed with joy. People lives and livelihoods have been saved. And it was through the work that God did through him that this amazing turn around occurred.

SO, Why is Jonah angry? Why would one, who believes in a God of abundant mercy and amazing grace, be angry at God because God has decided instead of punishing the people of Nineveh that God would be merciful and forgive the people ?

Perhaps it was an ego thing. Did it make Jonah look foolish that he told them that they would be destroyed and they were not? So, perhaps he thought his credibility was at stake.

Or more likely, as we here Jonah rant at God about how he knew God would show them mercy when they did not deserve it. Jonah believed that God's mercy and God's grace should not be bestowed on THOSE people. THOSE people who are our enemies. THOSE people who have taken advantage of us and oppressed us. THOSE people who we really really don't like. After all, "THOSE people" who have hurt our people don't deserve to be rescued by the God of our people? THOSE people don't deserve God's abundant

mercy and amazing grace, like our people do.

Those people, who differ with us. Those people, who fight with us. Those people, who hurt us. Those people who don't live like us, sound like us, or even love like us.

Jonah is angry at God for forgiving and saving THOSE people, who Jonah has deemed as unfit and undeserving of God's love, God's mercy and God's grace.

However, in God's eyes and in God's kingdom; there are not these people and "THOSE people", for all people are God's people, even those who don't yet know it or act like it. And it was God's covenant to Father Abraham, that Abraham's descendants would be blessed so that they could be a blessing to ALL nations.

So help us Lord, every minute of every day. Help us, who are blessed to know you, to receive your abundant mercy and amazing grace, and to be loved by you to be a blessing to ALL of

THOSE people. Help us, carry
your word of compassion and
grace to all the world, so that all
people will be OUR people. In
the name of the one who carried

out your love flawlessly, Jesus
Christ our Lord and Savior.

AMEN

Blessing

May
God, our Guardian, protect you,
Christ, our Healer, restore you,
and the Holy Spirit, sustain you,
this day and forever more.

Amen