

## Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Epiphany 3; January 24, 2021

He knew what was going to happen, and he didn't want to go. Have you ever had that happen to you? What do you do if it has? There are probably only a couple of ways that you can handle it. 1. You can put it off. You can just simply procrastinate. You avoid it and come up with a whole bunch of excuses to avoid it. 2. You can run away as fast as you can away from it. 3. You take the challenge on and go.

Jonah did 1 & 2. God had called Jonah to be one of his prophets. You are probably aware of some of content of the book of Jonah. The book of Jonah begins: <sup>1</sup> **"The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." <sup>3</sup> But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord."** Jonah was not a good example of a prophet. Not only does he say "no" to God, but he goes the opposite direction. Nineveh was about 600 miles to the east of where he was. Tarshish was about 2,200 miles to the west.

Why? Jonah knew who the people living in Nineveh were like. They needed to be destroyed. They were cruel, ruthless and they were violent. He knew of the destruction that they were capable of doing. They were the enemy. Why would he want to go to them and give them a way out of being destroyed?

When God wants something to happen, you are not going to stop him. If Jonah won't go to Nineveh, then the Lord would make him go. How? He sends a violent storm, has the sailors arise and pray and hurl Jonah overboard. The storm ends. The sailors are saved. The end! You could say that about the sailors in the boat, but not for Jonah. As Jonah was sinking, God caused some kind of a large fish to swallow him up. For 3 days he survived in the belly of this fish until the fish burped him on the shore.

That's where our text begins. <sup>4</sup> **"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."** So, Jonah goes, reluctantly. God only records five words (in Hebrew) of the sermon he preached: **"Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed!"** A pretty straight forward message: *"Repent or die."* Nineveh deserved it. It was an evil and sinful city. They deserved to be destroyed. Jonah really didn't want them to repent. He wanted them dead. They were the enemy. Why should he give them a way out? They were a city that was full of sinful, idol worshipping men and women.

What does Jonah do after he proclaims God's message of destruction? He builds some kind of structure outside the city and wait for the fireworks to begin. They deserved a good shower—a good shower like Sodom and Gomorrah got—fire and brimstone. He wanted God to do what he had done with the Egyptian are when they tried to cross the Red Sea. Jonah wanted the city of Nineveh to get what they should have coming. They didn't deserve a second chance.

Do we sometimes feel like Jonah? Do we sometimes want people to get what we think they should get? If someone dents our car, we want them to pay. If someone hurts us with words, we want them to get what we think they should. If someone doesn't meet our expectation, we want them gone. Do we ever feel like Jonah? It is much easier for us to understand judgment than mercy. Jonah didn't want God to show the people of Nineveh mercy. Jonah wanted the people of Nineveh to fail.

In the verses after our text, Jonah says: <sup>10</sup> **"When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened: <sup>4:1</sup> But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. <sup>3</sup> Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."** Perhaps, Jonah was also afraid that they may repent and God would show them mercy. Jonah didn't think they should be shown mercy. They didn't deserve God to show them mercy.

Yet, isn't that what God wants to do? He wants to show mercy. He wants to show so much mercy to us. Through another prophet of God, Isaiah, **"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."** (Is. 43:25) King David would say in the book of Psalms: **"<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; <sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."** (Psalm 103:11-12) When Jesus died on the cross, he cried out: **"It is finished."** Our forgiveness of sin is established and permanent because Jesus finished it. It's yours because through faith in him. Jesus has brought us Good News.

When God wants something to happen, he makes it happen. After those three days of Jonah preaching, God made it happen in a big way. A city of a 120,000 repented. **"The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth."** God's word worked in the hearts of people. Jonah didn't want to go because he assumed that they would not believe. He never thought that God would give the people hope and peace.

God could have destroyed Nineveh, but he didn't. He could have destroyed Jonah for not following his commands, but he didn't. He could destroy us, but he doesn't. That's what God does. He shows too much mercy. He changes hearts. He forgives people. He gives us the only peace that God can give. When God wants something to happen, he makes it happen. May God grant us his peace. Amen.