

**Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

**1** The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, **2** "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." **3** So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. **4** Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" **5** And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.... **10** When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

**Mark 1:14-20**

**14** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, **15** and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." **16** As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. **17** And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." **18** And immediately they left their nets and followed him. **19** As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. **20** Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Today is your lucky day because I am sure that most of you woke up this morning thinking, "Man, I hope we get a good repentance scripture at church today!" Then you get here and have not one but TWO! No? No excitement on the whole "repent or else" vibe? I love that Mark starts the story with a reminder that the call to repentance is good news because I think we associate repentance with being called out for our sinfulness, but what if Jesus had something else in mind?

Jonah was a prophet, called to speak repentance long before Jesus was born. He wasn't much interested in hearing that call either. The truth is, we can all relate to Jonah more than we want to admit. We certainly don't relate to the Ninevites because we don't see ourselves as evil people...we aren't running around willfully doing evil things. We all know we miss the mark with God...we aren't perfect, we have times when our actions aren't pure, when our thoughts aren't holy, when our intentions are more selfish than charitable. We sin...but we are really great at justifying it. Overall, we know we are sinners who fall short of the glory of God, but we don't feel we do so bad. At the end of the day, we are good people trying to do good things. Where we slip, however, is when we decide that our goodness outshines the behavior of others...when our justifications turn to the condemnation of others. We aren't like the Ninevites...they are bad...we are good, we just make mistakes...but "they" are evil..."they" shouldn't get a second chance to choose evil. Jonah felt justified in hopping a boat for Tarshish

and leaving Nineveh to be turned to ash. They were his neighbors, but he hated them, he didn't want to pray for them, he didn't want to save them. So, he ignored God's call and sailed away.

We don't want to admit we struggle with the same thoughts, we aren't as passionate about some ministries because we aren't fully convinced that some of our neighbors deserve that passion. We can often justify why we don't help, but so could Jonah. Nineveh was a vast city, home of the Assyrian King and Assyria was bad news. They were a pagan nation that often destroyed their neighbors. Interestingly enough, the name Nineveh means "the place of fish."

God wanted Jonah to go to the place of fish and fish for people...warn them, pray for them, let them know they are on the path to destruction but that God could save them and offer them a new path. Jonah didn't want to go fishing...but in the end the fish caught him. The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time...as he lay on the beach covered in fish vomit...get up and go. Of course, we would all like to think that after such a blatant redirect from God that we would joyfully jump at the change to get right with God...but not Jonah. Remember I said Nineveh was a vast city? I think the story exaggerates a bit but it tells us that Nineveh was a 3 day walk from one side to the other. It also tells us Jonah walked only one day. Jonah, still no doubt smelling like 3 day old sushi, only walked one day into the city...only about 1/3 of the way...and he half-heartedly called out a warning: "Forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown." That was it. That was all they got, according to the story. I don't know how they knew what to do next. I don't know why they believed Jonah. I don't understand why they so easily repented...but that isn't the point of the story.

Maybe the point of the story is what God can manage to do with a stiff-necked, half-hearted prophet and a people who are yearning to be given a chance for a new path in life. Maybe the point of the story is to take a long hard look at our own call to follow God and ask, "How much effort am I really putting in? Am I only half-heartedly following God? Am I only giving 1/3 of my energy to God? At the end of the day do we admit to God, "I did the minimum of what you requested, nothing more."

God can still use that...God is that powerful. God is not the one who lost out in this story. The people of Nineveh are not the ones that lost out in this story...it is Jonah who loses out. It is Jonah who leaves the city and sits sulking in the shade, angry that God extends mercy and grace to sinners and saints alike. It is Jonah, at the end of the story, who has not repented and reconciled with God.

Jonah didn't want to see what Jesus later comes to proclaim...that repentance is good news and should be met with great joy.

While Jonah only went part of the way in following God's plan, we look at Mark 1:19 and read, "Jesus went a little further." Jesus didn't set out to save one city, he came to save the world and, like God's call to Jonah, Jesus called to others to help him with his plan.

Simon, Andrew, James and John...who, unlike Jonah, don't seem to need a second call. They immediately drop their nets and leave their boats. No risk of being swallowed by a fish here, they are going fishing instead. But what does that even mean? We have turned it into a call to evangelism – to go out and "catch people for Jesus," but is that what Jesus is saying? What if his call to repentance is tied to something deeper than merely convincing someone to pray the 'sinners prayer' and be saved?

The word "repent" quite literally means "to turn around." We have heard nothing of the sinfulness of Andrew, Simon, James or John. What is Jesus asking them to repent from? If repentance is only about our sins, we don't know the answer to that. But what if Jesus is not talking about their sin as much as he is offering them a new path forward. What if "repent" is another way of inviting them to re-orient their lives and put Christ at the center. After all, that is similar to what Nineveh did – praying, fasting, doing everything that put God at the center of their lives.

Jesus says, "the time is fulfilled, the Kingdom is near," and we often hear that as a threat...time's up, get ready because the wrath of God is about to hit...but that isn't at all what Jesus is offering. In the Greek language there are two words used for time. Chronos which means time of the clock, time as a measurement. The word Mark uses, however, is Kairos which means "the right time," or "the appropriate time, or maybe even "God's time. What Jesus seems to be saying is, "The time is right for you to re-orient your lives, and when you do that you will see the Kingdom of God is near, it is in fact all around you and if you will just go a little further, give more than 1/3 of yourself to me, you will see it...experience it...live it.

To place Jonah's call and the call of the Disciples side by side forces us to take a hard look at where we are on the timeline of "becoming" the people of God. Are we at the Jonah end of the spectrum? Are we saying we are committed followers when in truth we are giving the bare minimum of our time and our effort to God's work in the world? Are we at the Disciple end of the spectrum, giving all of ourselves, despite not always understanding what God is up to, but we delight that God's work is redemptive and offers second chances, not just to us but to the world.

Maybe you've heard God calling before and the time wasn't right for you to answer. Is it the right time now? Because God isn't squeamish about fish vomit and is more than willing to get us up, clean us off, and send us back out there.

Becoming the people of God is about responding to the invitation to re-orient our lives around Jesus. What would you need to do, what would you need to change, what do you need to leave laying on the shoreline in order to get up and go toward a new life in Jesus?

If God can save a city with the half-hearted mumblings of a reluctant prophet, imagine what can be accomplished with a church full of committed, Christ centered, disciples who are willing to go further. Why, we might could just change the world. That is good news indeed.