

Jonah is Angry

Back to School: Part 1 “Jonah is Angry”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – August 6, 2023

10th Sunday after Pentecost

Readings: Jonah (summary of Jonah 1-4)

Reflection: Psalm 126

Greeting: Scripture helps you to be wise in seeking salvation. All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching. Scripture equips each person to do what is good. Let us learn and continue to grow in Christ our Lord!

Prayer: God, we believe that you provide us with all that we need in this life. You have not set us adrift in a sea of ignorance but have set us on the path of wisdom. Help us that we may grow in your love and knowledge. Let us never stop learning about your mercy and grace. Give to us a spirit that is eager to always know more so that we may do more for your sake. Help us to walk in your ways and that we may always seek your truth. And give to us a heart that we may love you more day by day as we share your love with the world. And may you guide us and lead us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reflection: Psalm 126

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.” The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.
(Psalm 126 NRSV*)*

We read the words of Psalm 126 and we hear of God filling us with joy. That the Lord provides for his people and cares for them. That God’s love is always there to lift us up. How has God’s love strengthened you this week? How have you strengthened others in love? What is something you can do in the coming week to share God’s message of hope? What does that hope mean to you in the coming week? How can we join together to always learn more in God’s love and care?

Prayer: Lord, we turn to you in all things knowing that you are always there for us. Help us to continue to grow in knowledge and truth by your Holy Spirit. Help us to grow in mercy and grace through our risen Savior. As we come before you this day we bring to you the concerns and joys that we have shared aloud together. We bring before you the unspoken worries and

celebrations of our hearts. May you guide us and lead us so that we know your blessing in our joy and our sorrow. We pray you will help us to grow in love through our laughter and our tears. May your steadfast love and faithfulness be our constant guide and companion. And may we always continue to grow in faith and in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from Jonah and will contain various readings from chapter 1 through 4.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. The sailors said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you." So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish. Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out onto the dry land. The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." 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. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. 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. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning, for I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The LORD God appointed a bush and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort, so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God

appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?"

(Jonah 1:1-4,7,11-12,15-17,2:1,10,3:1-5,10,4:1-11 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We start a new series this week, one that I am calling "Back to School." In this series we will be looking at lessons we may have learned in a children's Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. The issue is that with some of those lessons, we never went back to them as adults. In this series we will be looking at what else we might learn beyond that original lesson. We begin with the very well-known tale of Jonah. I selected verses from the first three chapters to summarize what is often in the children's version. For some of these, I've been referencing the old Storybook Bible the kids used to use. So, let us begin by looking at what happens in Jonah. First off, Jonah is called to be a prophet and is included in the minor prophets. God calls Jonah to go and deliver a message to Nineveh. A city full of sin. Worst place you could ask someone to go to because it is a place of great wickedness. Jonah doesn't exactly like the idea of going there to share God's message to cry out against Nineveh. Jonah heads in the opposite direction. Jonah isn't interested in doing what God has asked, he has decided to literally run away from his call. Jonah gets on a boat, but the boat is struck by strong winds. The people on the boat discover the cause of all this commotion is Jonah. Jonah tells them to throw him overboard. They try to figure out a way to not toss Jonah in the sea, but quickly realize it is the only way. So, they chuck him into the sea. Then a big fish sent by God swallows Jonah, rescuing him from drowning. While in the belly of the fish, Jonah prays. The prayer is heard, and Jonah is spit out upon the dry land. A second time God's voice comes to Jonah, and this time Jonah decides to heed the call. He sets out for Nineveh the very big and very wicked city. Jonah begins to walk across this large city and calls out to the people to repent. Now, the storybook Bible I have stops with Jonah doing what God has commanded. End of the story for the kids. But we still have more. This is where the surprise comes in. The people listen. From the king on down, they listen and repent. They fast with sackcloth to an almost comical point where even the animals are in sackcloth and are fasting. And because they have turned from their wicked ways, God does not bring destruction to Nineveh.

Now this is where the story really departs from our children's Sunday School lesson. This last part of Jonah may be confusing and is probably why chapter 4 of Jonah is not in the version for the kids. Jonah is angry. Why is Jonah angry? Jonah is angry because his mission was a success. You might be wondering why Jonah would be angry if his mission was

successful. It seems like a ridiculous reason to be angry! And in many ways, Jonah is ridiculous. The problem is that Jonah feels like he has just wasted his time. He even says that he expected God to be loving and merciful and that is why he tried to run away. He didn't think he would actually be needed. And we can be just like Jonah. We can easily trick ourselves into thinking that our efforts weren't needed because they were successful. Here's an example for you. The city has a problem, so they ask you to go around and tell everyone that they must boil their water until the problem is fixed or else people are going to get sick. You go and tell everyone, and they all boil their water. Nobody gets sick. And afterwards you think it was a waste of time because nobody ended up getting sick so it must not have been a very big problem in the first place. In avoiding disaster, we discredit the work done to avoid it. Jonah is angry because he went to Nineveh with a prophetic message of destruction and that prophecy did not come to pass. But somebody needed to go and tell Nineveh so that they would know they needed to change. But Jonah feels like he didn't need to go because God was going to forgive them anyways. Jonah would rather die, because he thinks they really aren't going to change at all. That all his efforts were wasted. It may seem silly, but we actually do this with all kinds of preventative measures. Sometimes people talk about how there was so much concern for the ozone layer, but now we don't hear anything about it. That isn't because it wasn't a problem, it is because we made global changes to correct our actions and it worked. But we will often question our success just like Jonah. We can't let that kind of thinking sink in and poison our faith.

Jonah lets the poison sink in, and he just wants to die. He thinks he wasted his time instead of recognizing that he helped save a great city. A lesson we can learn from this is that it is very easy to feel like we didn't do anything because we avoided the terrible thing that could have happened. It is all too easy to discredit our success because we expected the worst to happen. Jonah's issue is that he went and told the people of Nineveh that they were going to be punished and they listened. They were supposed to change, it was the entire point of sending Jonah. But now Jonah feels like there was no purpose in going because now his prophetic message will not come to pass. Jonah is upset that the people repented, and God had mercy. Jonah is blinded by his own anger. One way we could read this is that Jonah would be happier if the whole city had perished. Because then the message he was given would come to pass. It seems like Jonah would rather be right than to be helpful. He would rather his message come to pass rather than saving the people he was giving the message to. And I think that is something that we can reluctantly relate to.

On top of everything else, Jonah ends on a question. Not an answer to a question, but literally with a question. Jonah sets up camp to watch and see if Nineveh goes back to being wicked. While there, God causes a bush to grow and give Jonah shade. Jonah enjoys the shade while it lasts. But then God destroys the bush, and Jonah decides it would be better to die than to live now that the bush is gone. God points out to Jonah that he didn't do anything to cultivate the bush, yet Jonah is concerned with it. Jonah didn't have anything to do with it

growing. It popped up one day and was gone the next. Yet Jonah has enough in him to be angry and concerned over the bush. If Jonah can be concerned with things he had nothing to do with, shouldn't God be concerned with all the people in the city who don't know their right hand from their left? They needed Jonah to tell them. First Jonah was upset because he didn't want to go and deliver God's message. Then Jonah was angry about God's mercy. Now Jonah is angry that something he didn't work for went away. God isn't the only one in the story that is concerned for others. Jonah put the boat at risk with his selfishness. Yet the people on the boat still attempt to save Jonah if they can. The king in Nineveh is concerned with saving the people of the city. They are worried about saving others. Jonah is not.

Jonah is basically out there in his tent waiting to see if Nineveh fails. Because he wants to see if God will destroy them. Because Jonah isn't thinking about his success in helping to share God's love and grace. Jonah is thinking about what those people deserve. I think there's an important lesson for us today about Jonah's complaint and God's question. Because it's easy for us to get so focused on what we think other people deserve that we lose sight of God's grace for us. Jonah says that he knows that God is merciful. But Jonah is upset that he had to go all the way there and tell them so that they could experience mercy. We can't be resentful because God is a loving and caring God. We shouldn't get upset that God can care about people that we have trouble loving. Maybe it shouldn't upset us that God can forgive when we struggle to. Instead of getting angry at God for being so loving and merciful, maybe we should be asking God for the strength to be that loving and merciful ourselves. I think the grown-up message that we get from Jonah is about how we ourselves can care. Because it isn't just that Jonah runs away from God's call. It is that Jonah gets angry because God is more merciful than he is. God is more living than Jonah can comprehend. I think Jonah ends on a question because it is a question for us all. Who would you deny God's love to? Who would you deny God's mercy to? Who is it you would tell God to ignore? We must realize the answer to those questions reflects on our hearts and our relationship with God. Are we so stubborn that we would rather die than be wrong? Or do we allow God's love to change us? Jonah teaches us that we need to look at ourselves so that we can love and forgive without being resentful. That we need to make sure that we aren't angry at God for showing compassion. That we need to be able to turn to God so that we might be strengthened in compassion and mercy so that we can love how Christ loves us. That we may stand secure in our faith because we fully embrace God's love. A steadfast love that endures forever that is for all people. A love that offers forgiveness to all people. Let us deliver the message of hope that Christ has delivered to our hearts and let us rejoice when anyone is able to receive that grace. And let us always have hearts rejoicing for all who discover the love of Christ in their lives. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Back to School

Our current series is going to be taking a look at lessons we may have learned in a children's Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. But did we learn everything about the story that we need to know? What more can we learn now as adults? Each week we take on a new lesson as we go back to school!

Next Week: Reward & Punishment in Job.

For this message, we will be looking at how we often misunderstand rewards, punishment, and restoration in Job's story, with a focus on the final chapter.

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Connie Brown
Marsha Overton	Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox
Taylor Waldorf	Harriet Tucker	Becky McGuinness	Janet Yokum
Donna Farley	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins	Kara Newton

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