

9.20.20 Sermon, Pastor Jordan Gades, Jonah 3:10-4:11

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

What a time to be alive huh? Do any of you wake up in the morning with that brief sense of peace before being horribly assaulted by remembering reality. I'm pretty sure that's how every one of my mornings looks like. So much going on, left right, up down. Try to look away but everywhere it turns all we see are things that we wish weren't real.

And funny enough that's exactly where we meet Jonah from our first reading today. Now in case you were wondering. Yes, this is THE Jonah. The guy who was swallowed whole and spent 3 days and nights inside a whale or fish. That's the story we know from our Sunday school classes. That story stays with us doesn't it. It's an oddity. It seems so outrageous, so other worldly, that it sticks with us. And that's great. It really really is. Think about it. This is a story that connects us. It brings us together. It is a part of our shared culture, heritage, and faith. This is a part of our story as Christians, as followers of Jesus and our God who created the heavens and the earth.

But I have to say there is so much more to the story of Jonah that I wanted to spend our time today kinda diving into it. It's a story worth knowing.

A long long time ago in land far far away, there lived a man Named Jonah. Now Jonah lived in the promised land, the land given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the land taken back by the tribes of Israel. In this time before the kings it was a land in turmoil. There were the common squabbles for neighbors but then there were the larger kingdoms that surrounded them. These countries were always a threat. There was Babylon to the east, mighty and ancient. There was the powerhouse of Egypt to the south. There was a real fear that they could invade and take back their slaves at any time. But to the north was the danger of the time. The horrible and savage Assyrians sitting high in their capital of Nineveh.

Now the Assyrians are known for attacking everyone around them. They've destroyed town after town in surrounding countries and are now attacking, destroying, pillaging and killing all through the outlying villages and cities of the Israelites. They know they are doomed if the Assyrians turn their focus on the small hamlet of Israel.

Ok now you're caught up in the world of Jonah. Maybe you're seeing some parallels between our own time. It's a time of turmoil and strife. No one really knows what's going to happen next. There are threats on the horizon that are huge that affect the lives of the players in the story.

Maybe we could even tease this out just a touch more. Let's look at it from a broader picture. In this story we see two opposing sides, one horrifically evil, bent on destruction. And on the other the righteous, the good, the valorous. Makes sense.

Now Jonah's the good guy, wants the good guys to win, wants the bad guys defeated. Pretty standard motives. But then God throws a wrench in everything. God says, I am going to destroy the bays. Wipe them out. But first Jonah; you Go to the bad guys, go to those horrible people, and you tell them that they need to follow me, and Jonah, show them my love. And if you do that and they listen then I won't destroy them.

So normally every person in the bible when God tells them to do something they do it. Not Jonah. Jonah wants to see these bad guys wiped out. He is so blinded by his own hatred and fear that he openly defies God. So, he jumps on a boat and tries to sail in the opposite direction heading for the ends of the earth. Of course, God isn't going to let that stand, a storm rises,

Jonah gets thrown overboard and gets eaten. And I guess spending some time inside a fish or a whale gives you some time to think and Jonah repents, repents from the depths of his soul, says he'll go to those evil horrible people like God told him to. And Jonah gets spit up on land 3 days later. Then he goes up to those evil people, and I guess the walk was long enough to remember how much he hated those evil people so he does that absolute minimum in following God's orders. Because remember he still wants all these people dead. He spends 3 days moseying through, hey guys repent. Hey ya'll, follow God or your whole city is going to be wiped out (wouldn't that be terrible) turn from your ways and follow God, or you know whatever. Crazy thing is they listen and repent and turn to God. And God has mercy.

And Jonah throws his temper tantrum. Wines and pouts, says he'd rather be dead because the bad guys "won". The end.

What a great story. What a weird story. What does this story, which connects us with our God, our shared culture and history, and each other, have to do with today? A most valid question. And seeing how I haven't heard of any going missing on Milacs in a while, this might take a minute.

Did you see that part of the story where Jonah thought he knew everything, how from his point of view everything he said and did was justified?

Did you catch that patch where God did that weird thing where he showed love and mercy on a whole bunch of people who were supposed to be the bad guys in the story?

There's this weird flipping that keeps happening throughout the story that i don't have time to go into in depth but it's really this. Every time Jonah meets any other people it ends up that those people end up being the followers of God and Jonah really isn't. And that becomes an important note for us today.

We live in this incredibly divided and horribly troubled time. And more and more, somehow, we turn to the bad guys, whomever we think they are, because of course both sides are bad from the others point of view, we turn to them and we wish them harm. We wish them to be destroyed. We want that so much that we would rather work against our own Good and our God then even move an inch towards those we despise.

And while we aren't being thrown down the gullet of any whales, the storms are rising. And no matter what, we know who our God loves and who our God wants us to have compassion for, and who we are supposed to be living peacefully with. And it's not the people that only believe the same things we believe. It's not only the people who see things the same way as you. It's not only the people who have the same color skin as you or speak the same language as you. You maybe most of all, God doesn't only love you if you follow an elephant or a donkey.

You are called, just as Jonah was, to go to those who you think are deserving of justice and show them the caring compassion of our God. This is the story of our God. This is the arc that is played out again and again through the bible and it is being shown to us right now. It's not up to us to deal out Justice. That's God. Our job is to do the work set before us and Love your neighbor, no matter who they are, Period. Amen