

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans
“Caught...”
Jonah 1: 7-17
Pastor Jonathan

October 27, 2019
Reformation Sunday

How is youth different from older age?

Most of what we struggle with in the first half of life is conformity and adapting to the outer parts of our lives. The second half of our lives is about adapting to the inner part of our lives. We don't know how old Jonah was on this particular mission trip. We just know that he knew he was a prophet, had a mission, to call Nineveh to judgment, and he went the other way. Instead of going east to Iraq, he went west to Spain for a nice holiday. But that didn't work out for him. Why? Because God was pursuing him, even as he was running. God cared enough about him that He even got the captain and crew of the sailing ship he was on, to ask him about his spirituality and his God. He had a secondary mission to those around him even while he was running away. Did you notice how kind this is of God, and that Jonah's call as a prophet, a representative for God, continued even in his disobedience? Note that same grace on your life, when you are less than obedient to God. Note that others are still looking at you, when you are angry, upset, and less than a model Christian.

My point is this: God cares for you and I in the same way He did for Jonah, whether we are in the first or last half of life. God pursues you with love and truth. He pursues me similarly. There is a beauty in this relationship, where He pursues us gently and firmly. There are times where He speaks with a still, small voice, as He did to Elijah (1 K 19:12). Yes, God uses wind and earthquakes and fires, just look at the news from California, or other places, to get our attention. But usually He speaks to us in such a way that we need to listen or we will miss it. This is why it is critical for you to have a space where you can quiet yourself everyday before God, listening/reading the Scriptures, and then choose to agree with God no matter how much it costs you.

It is possible for God to let us go on our merry way to Florida, Spain or wherever, without the storms. But the storms in the book of Jonah are really a revelation of God's love. We don't usually see storms that way: they are distractions at best, and objects of fear, dread and destruction at the worst. So God allows Jonah to talk to those with whom he is sailing about the one, true God, the Creator of the sea and the dry land. (vv. 7-9) They come into relationship with this one, true God as a result of their encounter with Jonah and the storm. (v. 16) What is it worth to you

to see your neighbors or loved ones come to know the Lord? Would you put up with the storm(s) for such an outcome?

God even uses the casting of lots, throwing the dice, if you will, to name Jonah as the cause of the storm. (v. 7) And please note, Jonah is vulnerable with the sailors. He tells them that he is running away from God. (v. 10) Sometimes we don't like to be vulnerable with others, because we risk our reputation and standing with others. We're not sure how they will react. But there is a blessing in our honesty, as there was with Jonah's. God used the truth, even though it might have been difficult to reveal ("I'm the cause of the storm.").

Now last week we reflected on why we might run away from God. This week we are reflecting on how God catches us in our sins, for our benefit, for His purposes, for good. God is good. All the time. (meal time prayer)

How does God catch you in your sin and set you back on a right path before Him? I remember as a child picking at the edge of a personal school desk, with an ink well in it, refurbished with a kind of laminate or formica. I picked at the edge of the desk and a piece of the covering material broke off. The teacher later interviewed all the children who had sat in that chair and tried to prosecute me for that damage, which I caused, but was too fearful to admit. Just a little bit of furniture damage, but a lot of guilt and shame. Does God use guilt and shame in your life? I'm sure the devil uses it. I missed my opportunity to simply say, "Yes, I did it. I didn't mean to do it, but I did it." An abused child finds it hard to accept responsibility. But in the midst of being the offender, in some situation, whether school or work, how does God help you through it? Appropriate guilt and shame for sin leads to repentance and a change of heart. False guilt and shame weigh us down with a greatly diminished sense of self and being loved and accepted.

God asks us to admit when we are wrong, when we sin. Now we must know what sin is, to admit it, anything against God's will and way, as found in the Scriptures. And when we are not sure, God gives us our conscience, our sense of right and wrong. But these senses have been heavily weighed down by our culture telling us that almost anything is okay... I remember again as an older child being encouraged to wet toilet paper and to throw the damp wad of paper up against the ceiling of the public washroom at elementary school. It was fun. It was wrong. I think I was caught for that misdemeanor and made to help the custodian clean up the mess. I'm not sure.

Where does your mind go, when the question arises, “How has God caught you in the midst of your sins?” It may be ways of thinking, as Jesus mentions in Matthew 5, from the Sermon on the Mount. Wrongly thinking about others, in condemnation, or hatred is like murder, Jesus says. Wrongly thinking about others sexually, is like adultery. Only caring for those who care for you is no better than any person without faith and trust in God. God has a way of catching us in our thinking, and admitting where we go wrong to those who care about us, and then seeking help to follow Jesus in the most difficult and challenging areas of our lives.

“...let us find out...who is responsible for the calamity that is upon us...” says the sailors in verse 7. Have you been blamed, justly or unjustly? What are some of those experiences in your life? Leaders are often blamed for the difficulties a church or institution is going through. I know people often engage in what psychologists call “transference,” that is, transferring memories and dynamics of one relationship onto another. So, for example, if you have had bad experiences of the police, teachers, parents or authorities in your life, you are likely to project that bad experience onto other authorities currently in your life, whether you know you are doing that or not. This transference, of course, doesn’t have to be negative, it can be positive as well. So the current pastor may remind you of someone else in authority and there would be some emotional overlap. This is normal relational reality. It’s okay. But if we get into rough waters, it is good to be aware of why they are rough, and why relational storms take place in our lives. God is in the midst, allowing storms, but seeing what we will do with them. Jonah was honest and vulnerable in his sharing. God honoured that part of his journey. Yes, he was running away from God, but clearly he had not given up on God, and God had not given up on him. Where are you today? Are you giving up on God, or desiring Him no matter what it costs you, or somewhere in between?

God catches us and invites us, some might say sentences us to Church. The fish is in the story of Jonah, (v. 17) however large, however his digestion system worked, however oxygen was allowed inside him. We don’t know. But we do know the Church has swallowed us. You ask, “Is that a good thing?”

We know the Church is the bride of Christ, Jesus’ arms and legs, hands and feet in this world. So yes, the Church, with all her faults, is a good thing. We need to think of the Church as God thinks of the Church. Let me put a little different spin on Reformation Sunday.

The Reformation is the way God caught the Church in her sins, during the 1500s, yes, about 500 years ago. God allowed a priest in the Roman Catholic church

named Martin Luther and other reformers to question the selling of indulgences, salvation by contribution, if you will. He also wanted the Scriptures to be in the language of the people, rather than Latin or the original languages, so the people could understand the worship services and the Bible itself. The idea that only the educated clergy could really understand the Bible was being challenged. With the invention of the printing press, widespread reading of the Bible in one's local language was becoming the norm. Before that, people depended on the priest, or mostly depended on the art in the church, the stained glass windows and other art to depict biblical stories.

So the Reformation was how God caught the church. Was the church doing better unified in one institution, or better because it became many and spread more quickly across the face of the planet? I believe the church has done better in its split form, reproducing in many different forms across the planet in every culture, language environment and people group. The Reformation cries of *Sola fidei*, "by faith alone," *Sola gratia*, "by grace alone," *Sola Scriptura*, "by Scripture alone," and *Sola Christus*, "by Christ alone," all continue to key concepts for the Church. *Soli Deo Gloria*, "to God alone be the glory."

We are saved by faith alone and by grace alone, our response to God's gracious act in Jesus Christ. It is only by the revelation of Scripture that we can know God and be forgiven our sins. And all that we do is for God's glory. God's glory is first and foremost.

These principles were key in the movement called "reformed," and "Presbyterian." Reformed is simply the fact that the Holy Catholic Church was more than the Roman Catholic Church and was being changed in a biblical direction. The reform is the change. Presbyterian was and is the Greek word for "elders," or "rule by elders." Some nations and languages preferred "reformed," such as the Christian Reformed Church here in N. America and the Reformed Church of America. Whereas Presbyterian Churches, such as our Presbyterian Church in Canada, Presbyterian Church of America, Reformed Presbyterian Church are all here in the Ottawa area. Each of us have a specific history, with some more tied to Scotland or others more tied to the Netherlands, but all of us together in Jesus Christ. As of 1999 there were 746 Presbyterian denominations around the world and 529 seminaries. 18 presbyterian & reformed associations and denominations in Canada that go by "reformed" or "Presbyterian," and 45 in the US. 96 Presbyterian denominations and associations are in S. Korea alone. Churches in all denominations have united and split over the generations over what some might consider minor causes. Others have resisted union, such 40% of the Presbyterians

did in 1925 against the United Church of Canada. My point is that we need to be careful in evaluating church splits and unions, the latter not necessarily good and the former not necessarily bad. The Church the Lord sees is larger than any one denomination, non-denomination or movement.

As God catches us, personally, congregationally and denominationally, throughout history, let us determine to desire God's way and will in all that we do. In the end, we will give an account to Him. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

And in no matter what container we find ourselves, whether it is our usual work/recreation container, in prison, with health concerns, or time on our hands, or in the ocean inside a big fish, let us turn to God and cry out for His mercy and care, direction and peace.

Let us give thanks to the Lord, in this extended season of Thanksgiving.

Let us pray.