

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans

November 17, 2019

“Committed to the Mission”

Jonah 3: 1-9

Pastor Jonathan

Has anyone ever given you a second chance? If so, would you mind sharing with us about that? Have you felt the change in your life as someone has forgiven you for a sin you committed against the other person?

There's was one man who forgave me for something I did or didn't do, the exact wrong I can't remember now, and I simply remember him saying, "Apology accepted." It was in the West and I remember him somewhat of a cowboy type, whether that was an accurate memory or not. The beauty of that moment, was the transaction, where I knew I was forgiven and the relationship with this man and his family had been restored. Sometimes you don't get the sense that an apology has done anything, but in that case, it did. It's a beautiful thing when a person gets a second chance, in a relationship, where there was a grave error made or not.

### Jonah 3

So here's Jonah's second chance. (v. 1) "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." God was gracious to Jonah. God was with Jonah, when he called him. God was with Jonah, when he decided to run away from God. God was with Jonah in the storm. God was with Jonah, when he was drowning in the sea. God was with Jonah when he was inside the big fish. God was with Jonah, when the fish had vomited him up on to the shore. God was with Jonah on the long trek from that beach to Nineveh. And now Jonah was approaching Nineveh.

Do you know that God is with you, through the earliest part of your life? Have you written something to help you remember in this regard? Do you know God is with you through the storms of your life, right now? Do you know God is pursuing you even when you are running away? Do you know God is with you when you are in the belly of something you can't see yourself ever getting out of? Do you know God is a God of second chances? We have both examples in the Bible of people given one chance and people given many chances. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to give yourself, body, soul and spirit to Jesus Christ. Give your ambition to Him. Give your reputation to Him. Give your hopes to Him. Give your finances and your future to Him. Give your very self to God. In Him, you find your way. You find your mission, in Him. Why are you here on planet Earth? You find your meaning, as you have ears to listen, in relationship to Him.

Jesus knows what you are going through. God knows. God told Jonah the same thing He had said to him in the first place: Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” (v. 2). It was a simple and clear message. Nineveh is called “great,” because it was likely 120,000 people. This is four times the population of Samaria, which was larger than Jerusalem in that third quarter of the eighth century BC, before the fall of Samaria to Assyria in 722-721 BC.

It was the capitol city of the Assyrian empire. What happened to that city was significant to the whole known world at that time, just as what happens to Ottawa is significant to the whole of our country, no matter how the west or the east feels about it. National decisions are made here. National decisions were made there. And these national decisions affect foreign policy. So when we speak of the “great city of Nineveh,” it is not simply a question of size or population, it was also a matter of influence, nationally and on the world stage.

Jonah the prophet is about to speak to this city. What would he say? How would people respond? What would happen to Jonah, the prophet of God, coming to Ottawa? “Yeah, this fish vomited me up on the St. Lawrence River bank, and I’m here to bring you God’s message.” He would likely be told that we have an excellent psychiatric facility here in the city. How about you? How do we respond to God’s word, addressed to us, in this city? What affect does the Bible have on this city?

I can tell you we had a citywide prayer meeting on Thursday morning at the Community Pentecostal Church, where Pastor Hillier and his worship leader welcomed us warmly. Twenty pastors or so prayed together, sponsored by the One Way Ministries and the Thursday morning pastors’ breakfast group. It was good to pray together and remember we are more than just our own congregation. The Christian witness in the city is more than our own. You know that.

Nineveh was big enough that it took three days to walk around it, or through it (v. 3). Jonah was to simply proclaim the message throughout the city. Was he shy? Unlikely, but we don’t know.

Jonah was given a one sentence message, as far as we know. This time Jonah obeyed the Lord (v. 3). It’s always better when we obey the first time, and not wait for the consequences of disobedience.

That message is indeed a simple one, much shorter than today's reasonably short message: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." (v. 4) Simple. Clear. People knew what it meant. What language was Jonah speaking? Possibly not Assyrian, which left many clay tablets, cylinders and other literature from three thousand years ago and before. Possibly so. Jonah spoke a clear message in Assyrian: 40 more days and you're toast. (My translation.) There was nothing more than that to say. Please understand that the number forty in the Bible is the number of testing. Noah had 40 days and 40 nights on the ark. The Israelites had 40 years in the desert. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. What God was giving the Assyrians was their last chance to repent of their sins, and rather than saying, "Repent, for the end is near," as we may have seen on a few signs in the streets of North America over the last decades, Jonah simply tells the citizens of Nineveh that Judgement Day is coming. It likely does not mean in a month and ten days. It means SOON.

Jonah 3: 6-9 And the amazing thing is the people believe the message, right away. Even the king believes the message. They repent. They pray. They fast (stop eating their regular meals). They put on rough cloth, that was made for shopping bags. The king even takes off his royal robes and puts on the rough cloth and puts himself down in the dust, as one would do for mourning a death of a loved one. He even orders that the animals not be fed or watered for a while, to show that every living thing under his command, in his city, in his empire was to repent, to show a U-turn, a 180 degree turn toward God.

In fact there may a word play at work in Jonah's message. I would describe in English as "You turn, or your city will be overturned." And they do turn, by the grace of God.

Fasting is good. Changing your routine to pray more is good. Changing your clothes to say you are changing your ways is less known in our society, but how you dress does display something of what you are on the inside...

You know we hear in history about great revivals where the people receive the message of the Gospel with tears in their eyes and a great change in their lifestyles. You may know the name Charles Finney, who was a Presbyterian and a revivalist. He had many meetings just below Lake Ontario, certainly in Rochester, NY in 1830 and 1831. Many were saved. They changed their lives. Crimes decreased there by two thirds. The population increased by two thirds. Revival changed the landscape and no one was left untouched. Similarly in the Welsh revival of the early 1900s, the majority of the whole nation of Wales came to know Jesus, and

crime virtually disappeared. The police started choirs amongst their members because they had so little work. The prisons emptied. The Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles just after 1900 also has had a world-wide impact, the place where Pentecostalism began. God has even used Toronto and the Vineyard there in the 1990s to change thousands of hearts and lives.

I don't know what you believe about revivals, new life coming to people in large numbers, but history has shown it to be a real thing happening. It is not the only thing God does. It is one instrument in God's symphony. We simply trust the Lord for the numbers and the results. This is what God did through Jonah in Nineveh, even when Jonah was far from experiencing God's heart for the Ninevites, the residents of Nineveh. We find out later that Jonah didn't even like the fact that the people were turning to God. But wait for that in a coming message.

God was saving these people. They cried out to Him. What does it take for us to cry out to Him? What would it take for Ottawa to cry out to Him? Floods? Tornados? Fires?

It's hard to know what moves the human heart, here or anywhere else. God knows us. This is a time in our church, in our denomination, in our congregation, in our faith walk everyday, to put our trust in Jesus as never before, where we are called to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Jonah trusted God. God did an amazing work. The people of that city long ago received the benefits. That empire received the benefits from God and God used them in His redemptive history.

Interestingly, Jonah was not pleased. What do you think about what God is doing in other denominations, congregations and moves of God across North America, Canada, and here in Ottawa? Do you believe God is moving through them? Can you wholeheartedly bless others in other streams of Christian faith in these days? How can you see God moving in our own Church?

Let us have eyes to see and ears to hear what God is doing here in these days? Let us obey God the first time and trust his power to give new life to great numbers. How about 19 million lives changed in Canada? Would you have faith to agree with me for that number of Canadians changed by the Gospel in the days to come? That would a majority of the population, acknowledging God to have dominion from sea to sea, from the islands to the west and the east and the north, and everything in between. Let us trust the God who brought life through Jonah.

Let us pray.