

AUGUST 6, 2017 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
“JONAH: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET”

Pastor Becky Smithey
Scripture: Jonah 1:1-16

[Read Jonah 1:1-3]

We sang "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" this morning as we began our worship together. One of the stanzas in the hymn says:

*"Jesus sought me when a stranger, Wand'ring from the fold of God,
He, to rescue me from danger, Interposed his precious blood,
Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love.
O to grace how great a debtor Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter, Bind my wandering heart to thee"*

I read those words and think about how quickly we are prone to wander. I think how far we can go. And I think how easy it is to deceive ourselves and others when we have stepped out of the will of God. These searing words speak to an inner battle we all feel from time to time - a battle we sometimes win - sometimes lose. Sometimes we walk in God's will - other times we don't.

"Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love."

Anytime we walk out on God's will we sin.

Have you ever heard anyone complain: "God is too loving. God is too kind. God is too forgiving. God shows too much mercy." No - I have never heard anyone say that either. But that is what Jonah thought. God wanted Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach to them, but Jonah wanted Nineveh punished. Jonah knew that if he went to preach to them that God might just let them off the hook - God might forgive Nineveh. So Jonah ran away--he ran as far as he could. He booked passage on a ship headed to Tarshish. He didn't miss the boat. He got on board. Jonah was confident that He had outrun God, went down in the hold, and then he took a nap.

But the fact is: No one can out-run God.

So what does God do:

"The LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea so that there was a great storm on the sea; the ship looked like it might be broken to pieces. The sailors were terrified, and each one cried out to his god. They hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to make it lighter. Now Jonah had gone down into the hold of the vessel to lie down and was deep in sleep." (Jonah 1:4-5)

1. Jonah Needs to Pay Attention!

It must have been a really bad storm because these men, who were professional sailors—who had seen it all—were afraid. They had never seen anything quite like this storm. They were hardened sailors and were used to the dangers of a life at sea, but this storm was worse than anything they had encountered before.

Notice that they did two things to try to save their lives.

- A. They prayed
- B. They threw the cargo overboard.

We all know that life can change in a moment. There can be storms. There can be troubles. There can be sickness. There can be death. There can be financial collapse. Problems can happen at any moment. The best

thing we can do is to start with prayer, then take action to help the situation. But did the storm get Jonah's attention? NO! Jonah was still fast asleep.

Before I move on, let me point out a fact:

Others suffer because of our sin. We think that when we sin, we are only hurting ourselves. Folks, that's not true. Look at the story: Everyone on board the ship is endangered by Jonah's sin. We are all in the same boat. Jonah was the sinner in this situation, and yet his foolish rebellion endangered everyone around him.

Please ponder these 4 words: **We never sin alone.** We may be alone when we sin, but we never sin alone. Our sin, our compromise, and our deceit always injures those around us—our spouse, our children, our friends, and our family.

Every step we take out of the will of God hurts those around us.

Jonah is sleeping but:

2. Jonah needs to be woke up!

As the ship is tossed by the waves...as the ship groans and creaks under the power of the storm...as the sailors are throwing the cargo overboard...where is Jonah? He is in the hold of the ship fast asleep.

You might think he'd be on deck helping the sailors. Not a chance! He's down below taking a nap. Verse 6 tells us:

"The ship's officer came and said to him, 'How can you possibly be sleeping so deeply? Get up! Call on your god! Perhaps the god will give some thought to us so that we won't perish.'" Jonah 1:6

How could Jonah sleep during a terrible storm like this? How can Jonah not realize that his life and the lives of all of those around him are in danger? How could he sleep at a time like this? The answer is simple—Jonah thinks he can outrun God. He thinks he got away with it. If you're off the hook, why worry, why fret, why be concerned about God when you've run away from Him and He can't find you? You can sleep as sound as a baby. But if the storm won't wake him up, the captain surely will.

The captain yells at Jonah: "How can you sleep at a time like this? Get up!"

Look what happens next: At this point the captain (who is no doubt a pagan) has more spiritual insight than Jonah does. Seeing the danger, the captain wants Jonah to wake up and start praying. Pray, Jonah, pray. Maybe your god can save us.

Do you see what is happening? Everyone else is praying, but it's doing no good. All the sailors were praying to their gods. I'm sure that the captain had been praying to his god, but it wasn't good enough, nothing was happening. They needed someone to pray to a God who could save them.

Does Jonah pray? The Bible doesn't tell us that he prayed. He probably didn't—he was still running from God. So the sailors take the matter to the next step:

3. Jonah needs to be found out!

"Meanwhile, the sailors said to each other, 'Come on, let's cast lots so that we might learn who is to blame for this evil that's happening to us.' They cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. So they said to him, 'Tell us, since you're the cause of this evil happening to us: What do you do and where are you from? What's your country and of what people are you?' He said to them, 'I'm a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven—who made the sea and the dry land.' Then the men were terrified and said to him, 'What have you done?' (The men knew that Jonah was fleeing from the Lord, because he had told them.)" Jonah 1:7-10

Jonah is now found out by the casting of lots (vs 7). That may seem strange to us, but look at what Proverbs 16:33 says:

“The dice (lot) is cast into the lap; all decisions are from the Lord.” Proverbs 16:33

We might paraphrase Proverbs 16:33 this way: “Life is like a roll of the dice, but God is in charge of how the numbers come up.”

Casting lots sometimes involved using different colored balls or rocks, mixing them together, and then seeing which one fell out of the bag first. In that sense casting lots is like rolling dice. To us it appears to be a random act of chance, but they believed that God left nothing to chance. There are no “accidents” in life, no “random” events, and there is no such thing as “luck.” Even seemingly meaningless things fit into His plan. God is always in control of each and every situation.

Did you know that in speaking about the order of the universe, that Albert Einstein once said, “God does not throw dice.” What he meant by that is that nothing is left to chance. In any case, Jonah is found out. Jonah confesses his true identity. He had already told them that he was running from the Lord so now he tells them who he really is:

“He said to them, ‘I’m a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of heaven—who made the sea and the dry land.’” Jonah 1:9

Isn’t it amazing how God works? Jonah may run and run and run, but he can never really change who he is. He cries out, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord.”

Jonah was part of the covenant people. He had learned about God from the time he was an infant. He had kept the traditions of the Jews. He had prayed to God and he knew God. No matter how far he ran, he could not out run God.

Jonah, if you’re a Hebrew, you need to live like one. You need to act like one. You need to talk like one. You need to walk like one. You need to pray like one.

There is a message in this for us all, isn’t there? Folks, if you’re a believer, you need to live like one. You need to act like one. You need to talk like one. You need to walk like one. You need to pray like one. Why? Because you can’t out run God. God wants us to always behave like a believer.

Now look what happens next. Things are about to get worse for Jonah.

4. Jonah needs to be sacrificed!

“They said to him, ‘What will we do about you so that the sea will become calm around us?’ (The sea was continuing to rage.) He said to them, ‘Pick me up and hurl me into the sea! Then the sea will become calm around you. I know it’s my fault that this great storm has come upon you.’” Jonah 1:11-12

Jonah knows it’s all his fault. So when the sailors ask what they should do to make the seas grow calm again, he offers the only solution that makes sense: *“Pick me up and throw me into the sea and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”* (vs 12)

But when Jonah said, “Throw me overboard,” the sailors would not do it. Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Look at what verse thirteen says: *“The men rowed to reach dry land, but they couldn’t manage it because the sea continued to rage against them.”* Jonah 1:13

Finally, they decide to throw Jonah into the sea. Look at what verse 14 and 15 say:

“So they called on the Lord, saying, ‘Please, Lord, don’t let us perish on account of this man’s life, and don’t blame us for the innocent blood! You are the Lord: whatever you want, you can do.’ Then they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased its raging.” Jonah 1:14-15

In order to save the ship, Jonah must be sacrificed.

Folks, to me, this is a picture of salvation. In order for the ship to be saved, one must die. One must be sacrificed. We can try to save ourselves. We can try to row to shore. We can try with all our energy, but those efforts are futile. You cannot save yourself. In your own efforts, you cannot reach the shore of salvation...it will not happen. Only God can save you. Only the sacrifice of the One can calm the sea. Only the sacrifice of One provides safety. He must die that we may live.

So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. But here is the truth I don’t want you to miss:

5. Jonah needs to be a Missionary!

Have I told you that God loves Nineveh? But here is a truth also: God loves Tarshish, too!

Look at what happened in the story. A fierce storm comes. The ship is in danger of sinking. So what do they do? They prayed. But if you go back and look in verse 5, notice who the sailors prayed to. “Each one cried out to his god.” In verse 14, they changed the direction of their prayers. They now prayed to the One True God. Now notice what happens in verse 16:

“The men worshipped the Lord with a profound reverence; they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made solemn promises.” Jonah 1:16

They are not praying to their own gods, they are worshiping the One True God.

In the Hebrew language, there are a number of different words for God...El, Elohim, Yahweh, and so on. Yahweh was the covenant name of God. It’s the name the Jews used when they spoke of the One True God who had made promises to Israel. For the Jew, it was the most sacred name for God in the Old Testament. It was the name for God as He created Adam from the dust of the ground. It was the name of God when he scattered the nations at the tower of Babel. It was the name for God when He struck Pharaoh with the plagues. It was the name of God as He met Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Now the sailors were no longer praying to their own gods. They were now praying to the One True God. Their spiritual condition had changed. They now had started praying to the One True God...Yahweh. Now they feared the Lord...Yahweh. Now they made a sacrifice and vows to Yahweh. Their lives had been changed. Their lives had been saved.

They prayed. They sacrificed. They worshiped.

Suddenly, the boat was filled with enthusiastic worshipers of the One True God. And where is that boat going? It’s not headed to Nineveh. It’s headed for Tarshish...with a boatload of missionaries. Can you imagine the story that they had to tell? A story about a man who was running from God, but God won’t let him go. A story about a God who is so powerful that even the wind and sea obeys Him. A story about a God who loves people, and wants to see them saved.

We’re going to hear next week that “salvation is from the Lord.” Salvation always comes from the Lord. Thank God that He is a God who saves. That He will go to the ends of the earth for you and for me and for all of his creation so that we might be saved through Him. Amen.