

# AUGUST 13, 2017 BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## “AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA”

Pastor Becky Smithey

### Scripture: Jonah 1:17-2:9

Jonah is not the hero of this story. God is! At the beginning of the story, Jonah is running from God; at the end of the story Jonah is arguing with God. In between, Jonah is praying to God and Jonah is preaching for God. But through it all, keep in mind, Jonah is not the hero of the story. God is!

The story of Jonah is a story about a God who wants to see people saved. It is a story of a God who will reach to the ends of the earth to ensure that people hear of His great love and forgiveness. It is a story about a God who is concerned about the people in the city of Nineveh and His desire is to save them. Folks, here is a fact: God always wants to save people!

God is in the saving business. That is why God sends Jonah to Nineveh. He wants to see them saved. John 3:16 tells us this:

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* John 3:16 (KJV)

God doesn't want anyone to perish. He wants everyone saved.

The story of Jonah also tells us that God shows compassion for prodigal sons and daughters who run away from Him. God never gives up on Jonah, not even when Jonah runs away from God. Not even when Jonah is disobedient. Not even when Jonah sits under a vine and pouts because he's mad at God.

The first verse that we are going to look at today proves that point.

*“Meanwhile, the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.”* Jonah 1:17

This is the part of the story we know best. Jonah has run from God. Jonah has been thrown overboard. Now, Jonah gets swallowed by a great fish. From this verse, I want us to look at three points:

#### **1. God shows Jonah His Sovereignty!**

Note that the text doesn't say the Lord “created” a great fish. It says that God “provided” or “appointed” a great fish. The great fish already existed and God gave it a mission.

Notice that our text does not use the word “whale.” Yes, we have been taught that in Sunday School, but that is not what the Bible says. The Bible says it was a fish. It doesn't say a whale. It could have been a whale, but we don't know for sure. You see, the focus of the story is not on the fish, it is on the sovereignty of God.

*“Meanwhile, the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah.”* Jonah 1:17a

Did the fish just happen to be swimming in the area of the water that Jonah got thrown into? No! *“The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah.”* It wasn't just good luck. It wasn't just coincidence. It wasn't just a fluke. The salvation of Jonah at this point is based on the actions of God. Folks, here is a fact: God saved Jonah!

Did the fish have a part in it? You bet it did! I can almost imagine the conversation that went on between the Lord and the fish.

Lord says to the great fish: "I've got a job for you."

The great fish replies: "Yes, sir."

God: "I want you to swallow a fellow for me."

Fish: "Yes, sir."

God: "Now no chewing. No biting. You need to swallow him whole."

Fish: "Yes, sir."

God: "Now I'll give you the exact GPS coordinates. Do you know where that is?"

Fish: "Yes, sir."

God: "You will need to be there at a precise time, on a precise day, at a precise location. Do you think you can handle it?"

Fish: "Yes, sir."

God: "Good, let's go for it!"

*"The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah." Jonah 1:17a*

Folks, here is an interesting aspect of the story: the fish obeyed God better than Jonah did! God wanted Jonah to head for Nineveh. Jonah ran in the opposite direction. Jonah headed for Tarshish. The fish swam to the exact place where he needed to be. And because the fish was there, Jonah's life was spared. He was there in the right place at the right time.

## **2. God shows Jonah His Persistence!**

God told Jonah, "Go to Nineveh." Jonah said, "I think I'll go to Tarshish instead." In other words, God said, "Go east." Jonah said, "I'm headed west."

Jonah's actions were out and out disobedience. Jonah's actions were just plain rebellion. Jonah's actions were clearly an act of sin.

God could have zapped him on the spot. God could have wiped the memory of Jonah off the face of the earth. God could have destroyed Jonah in a flash, but He didn't. God ran after him. Jonah could never out run God. God is persistent.

Let me ask you: Can you help a Prodigal too soon? Do you remember what happened to the prodigal son in Luke 15? After he had wasted all his inheritance in wild living, he ended up feeding pigs (Luke 15:15-16). But it wasn't until he reached rock bottom that he was ready to make a change.

*When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough food, but I'm starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands."' Luke 15:17-19*

So it goes. We may think that someone has hit rock bottom when they are still scheming to find a way to get out of their problems. The prodigal may be thinking, "With one more day, I will figure it out. With one more day, I can solve my own problems." It was not until the son "came to his senses...came to himself" that he decided to return to the father. It was not until he came to himself that his relationship with the father was made right.

I wonder if Jonah has reached that point. I wonder if Jonah is ready to stop running. I wonder if Jonah is ready to be obedient. I wonder if Jonah is ready for a changed heart.

You see, the problem is always on the inside. God says east...Jonah says west. God says "obey"...Jonah says "No way." Jonah, are you still running? Jonah, are you ready for a change? Jonah are you ready to get right with God? Jonah, don't you see that God is chasing you? Jonah, don't you know that God will continue to chase you to the ends of the earth?

Jonah, stop running from God! Jonah, turn to God! Jonah, catch up to God! Go where He wants you to go. Do what He wants you to do. There will be no peace until there is peace with God. The truth is, God will follow you to the ends of the earth...until you catch up to Him. He will never let you go. Kathryn Oppenlander's favorite verse comes from Hebrews 13:5, and it says this:

*"I will never leave you, nor forsake you."* Hebrews 13:5

I think that is great news for those of us who God to always be by our side. But guess what? God will never leave His children...even if they are trying to run away from Him. Jonah, you can't out run God. God can run faster and farther than you think. And God has all the time in the world, and He will never let you go.

### **3. God shows Jonah His compassion!**

Why did God send the fish? To show Jonah His compassion.

Do you know that at any time God could have zapped Jonah? God could have killed him in an instant. He could have made Jonah fish bait, but He didn't. Instead, God showed Jonah compassion. Look at what the Bible tells us:

*The Lord is compassionate and merciful, very patient, and full of faithful love.* Psalm 103:8

Was Jonah's life uncomfortable when he was thrown overboard? You bet it was! Was Jonah's life miserable? Yes! Did Jonah find himself in an overwhelming predicament? Of course he did! But why? Because he had sinned against God...that's why! He had disobeyed. The scripture is true:

*"Know that your sin will find you."* Numbers 32:23

*"Make no mistake, God is not mocked. A person will harvest what they plant."* Galatians 6:7

*"The wages that sin pays are death..."* Romans 6:23

You see, Jonah thought he had gotten away with it. He thought that he had outrun God. But he found out the hard way that there is no way to outrun God. Jonah thought he had booked a great Mediterranean cruise and now he is dog paddling in the water about to be swallowed by a fish!

You can NEVER, NEVER, NEVER out run God!

But you say, "Wait a minute, Pastor Becky, you said that God shows Jonah compassion." Yes, He does. God gives Jonah a second chance. Isn't that compassion?

I am thankful that God is a God of compassion, aren't you? He gives second chances. He rescues us from danger. He watches over His children, even when they are running from Him. Even when they are disobedient, He never lets us go. This shows me that God has compassion for us.

Do you remember the stories of Israel, how time and again they would fall away from God? How often they would rebel against Him. How often they would sin against Him. How often they would turn their backs on Him. Yet, in their inconsistency, God remained consistent. Look again at what the Bible tells us in Nehemiah:

*"You, in your great mercy, didn't abandon them in the wilderness. The column of cloud continued to guide them on their journey during the day, and the column of lightning lit their path during the night."* Nehemiah 9:19

Let me ask you a question: Earlier, I mentioned the story of the prodigal son. In that story, do you think that the father ever stopped loving his son? No! I don't think so either. In fact, I think that every day, the father thought about his son. Every day, I think the father wondered how the son was getting along...how he was doing. Every day, I imagine that the father went out on the porch and looked off in the distance to see if the son was returning home. Then one day, the father sees the son. He runs out and hugs him and holds him. Doesn't that say something about our Heavenly Father?

Jonah runs...God rescues.

Jonah runs...God saves.

Jonah runs...God gives a second chance.

*The Lord is compassionate and merciful, very patient, and full of faithful love.*” Psalm 103:8

Let me ask you...where are you right now? Are you on your way to Nineveh or are you on the way to Tarshish? Are you walking in God's will, or are you walking out of it? Be sure, God knows where you are. He knows what you have done. Yet, He is a God of second chances. He is compassionate. He is gracious. He is slow to anger. He is abounding in steadfast love. And He will do whatever He needs to do to get you back on track. Why don't you turn to him before He appoints a great fish to head your way!

### **Luke 15:11-24 (CEB)**

<sup>11</sup> Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the inheritance.’ Then the father divided his estate between them. <sup>13</sup> Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.

<sup>14</sup> “When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, but I’m starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.’” <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! <sup>23</sup> Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting <sup>24</sup> because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

**L:** The Word of God, for the People of God.

**P:** Thanks be to God! Amen.