

**AUGUST 27, 2017**

**BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**“JONAH, THE POUTER”**

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**Scripture: Jonah 4:1-11**

A new resident to the community was walking down a street and noticed a man struggling with a washing machine at the doorway of his house. When the newcomer volunteered to help, the homeowner was overjoyed. The two men began working on the bulky appliance one from the inside the house...the other on the porch. After several minutes of fruitless effort, the two stopped and just stared at each other in frustration. They looked as if they were on the verge of total exhaustion. Finally, when they had caught their breath, the first man said to the homeowner: “We’ll never get this washing machine in there!” To which the homeowner replied: “In? I’m trying to move it out of here!”

They were not on the same page. Neither was Jonah and God.

When we left off last week, Jonah had preached to Nineveh. And as he was preaching the shortest sermon ever, a great revival took place...greater than any revival in the history of the world. It pleased God...but not Jonah. Let’s pick up the story in chapter 4 of Jonah:

*“But Jonah thought this was utterly wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, ‘Come on, Lord! Wasn’t this precisely my point when I was back in my own land? This is why I fled to Tarshish earlier! I know that you are a merciful and compassionate God, very patient, full of faithful love, and willing not to destroy. At this point, Lord, you may as well take my life from me, because it would be better for me to die than to live.’”*  
Jonah 4:1-3

I love it when a story has a happy ending. I like it when the good guy wins, the bad guy loses and the hero rides off into the sunset with a beautiful young woman at his side. Don’t you love those types of stories? But that is not what happens in the book of Jonah. If the story had just ended at chapter 3, I think I would have been OK with it...but we have chapter 4.

You would think Jonah would be happy. But no...he’s not! He is angry with God for showing too much mercy. He is angry with God for showing too much compassion. He is angry with God for forgiving “THOSE” people. He is angry with God for not destroying them, like Jonah thought they should be destroyed. Bottom line: He is angry at God for acting like God.

Do you see what was going on in Jonah’s mind? Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh because he knew the character of God. He knew that God was gracious. He knew that God was compassionate. He knew that God was slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness. He knew that God would forgive them if they turned from their wicked ways and sought the ways of the Lord. But here is the bottom line Jonah: God is God...and Jonah is NOT!

Boy this is a hard lesson for Jonah to learn. But then again, it’s a hard lesson for all of us to learn. Because if the truth be known, there is a little Jonah in all of us and a lot of Jonah in most of us. Can I really let God be God? Can I really let Him take control of my life? Can I really trust Him and believe that He knows what is best for me? Can I really acknowledge that He is in control and I’m not...even though sometimes I think I am?

God will often do unpredictable and extraordinary things...and sometimes they are things I don’t like. Look at these passages of Scripture:

*“My brothers and sisters, think of the various tests you encounter as occasions for joy. After all, you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let this endurance complete its work so that you may be fully mature, complete, and lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4*

*“We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope. This hope doesn’t put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Romans 5:3-5*

Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials...We are also happy with the troubles we have. What is the Bible talking about? When trials come...when trials come, I am neither happy nor filled with joy. But here is a fact: God is always more concerned with our character than with our comfort. Maybe, Jonah, you need an attitude adjustment? Maybe, Jonah, you need a change of heart? Jonah, are you listening? Jonah, are you learning? Jonah, can you hear what God is trying to teach you? God is in charge...not you. You are not in charge of Him. Jonah, don’t you know what God says:

*“I’ll have mercy on whomever I choose to have mercy, and I’ll show compassion to whomever I choose to show compassion.” Romans 9:15*

God does not ask your permission. He does not ask your blessings. He is God and you are not. But look at the question God does ask Jonah:

*“The Lord responded, ‘Is your anger a good thing?’” Jonah 4:4*

Notice that Jonah never answers God at this point. He never says anything. Let’s pick up the story again:

*“But Jonah went out from the city and sat down east of the city. There he made himself a hut and sat under it, in the shade, to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a shrub, and it grew up over Jonah, providing shade for his head and saving him from his misery. Jonah was very happy about the shrub. But God provided a worm the next day at dawn, and it attacked the shrub so that it died. Then as the sun rose God provided a dry east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint. He begged that he might die, saying, ‘It’s better for me to die than to live.’ God said to Jonah, ‘Is your anger about the shrub a good thing?’ Jonah said, ‘Yes, my anger is good—even to the point of Death!’ But the Lord said, ‘You pitied the shrub, for which you didn’t work and which you didn’t raise; it grew in a night and perished in a night. Yet for my part, can’t I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who can’t tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?’” Jonah 4:5-11*

So Jonah now leaves Nineveh and goes out east of the city. He’s still hoping against hope that God will send down fire and brimstone and destroy the city. When that happens, he’ll have a front row to watch it happen. But God has other plans. Three things happen in short order...all of them appointed by God:

- A. God appoints a vine (vs. 6)
- B. God appoints a worm (vs. 7)
- C. God appoints a scorching east wind (vs. 8)

You see, in Jonah’s eyes, the vine was good because it gave him shade. The worm was bad because it chewed up the vine. The east wind was very bad because it caused him great discomfort. Yet all three of these things...the vine, the worm, the wind...came from God. The same God who appointed the vine also appointed the worm and also appointed the scorching wind. The real question boils down to this: Jonah do you only love God when He gives you what you want?

That’s a good question for all of us. Do you only love God when things are going well?

Do you remember what we just read a few minutes ago:

*“Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials.”*

*“And we are also happy with the troubles we have.”*

Do you only love God when things are going well? Do you only love God when the sun is shining? Or do you love God when the storms of life come crashing down on you, too?

Do you want me to tell you what I think is going on in the book of Jonah? Let me tell you... In chapter 3, God saves Nineveh. In chapter 4, God is in the process of saving Jonah. You see, salvation is a process. God wants us to be changed...to be more like Him. That is what the Bible says:

*“Carry out your own salvation with fear and trembling. God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good purposes.”* Philippians 2:12-13

Or what about the passage of scripture which says:

*“Don’t be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God’s will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.”* Romans 12:2

You see, God is at work in us. He is not finished with us yet. He wants us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. He wants us to change the way we think about things.

God knows how to deal with wicked sinners. He saves them. But what does God do with those “holier than thou” church folk? He saves them, too. He saves them to be more like Him. You see, God is in the life changing business. He saves people and He continues to save them (transform them) throughout the journey of their lives. God is transforming us...changing us...getting us ready for Heaven.

How can we tell if we are being changed? How can we know that God is working in our lives? We know that we are being changed when we start loving the things God loves. We know that we are being changed when we start acting like God acts. God is the potter and we are the clay. God is in the process of molding and making us into his own image.

Jonah’s story ends with a question. God asks Jonah: “Should I not have compassion on Nineveh? Should I not be concerned about that great city? Should I not love the people there?”

The answer, of course, is yes. God always loves people. God is always concerned about people. But there is a great difference between Jonah and God. God loves people. Jonah loved the plant more than he did the people. Jonah was more concerned with his comfort than he was with his character. He would rather be comfy and cozy than be concerned about the condition of Nineveh.

Does Jonah change his mind? Does he come to see things the way that God sees them? Does he start loving people in the end? The story doesn’t tell us, does it? It just leaves us wondering. It just leaves us hoping.

But here are 3 things we can learn from the Book of Jonah:

### **1. God loves people!**

God loved the people in Nineveh. He loves the people in New York. He loves the people in New Orleans. He loves the people in Charlottesville, VA. He loves the people in North Korea and China. God loves people. God has always been concerned about people.

Nineveh is people. Nineveh is your neighbor next door. Nineveh is the teller at the bank. Nineveh is the guy next to you in line at the Walmart. It is the person you bump into at the Kroger. It is the people you see driving down the road. Nineveh is the relative you haven’t spoken to in years because you’re mad at them...even though you don’t remember why. Nineveh is the pregnant teenager...that “should have known better.”

Nineveh is the person you saw that has all the tattoos and body piercings that you just raised your eyebrows at. Nineveh is the person who can't go any length of time without abusing prescription meds, drugs—heroin, cocaine, or alcohol. Nineveh is everyone—all the people around you—your friends and your foes—the good guys and the bad guys—everyone in your neighborhood...in fact, everyone in the world. God loves them.

You see, Nineveh is not just a place, it is people. Wherever you find people, there you find Nineveh in all its splendor and power and glory and greed and brutality and evil. It's all there, mixed together, the good with the bad, the light with the darkness. Look around, child of God, you and I live in Nineveh.

The message is clear: God loves Nineveh, because He loves people. He loves the people who make their living in the big city. He loves the people working in the country. God loves people. He always has and He always will. And the story of Jonah is that God wants Nineveh saved.

## **2. God's plan for saving people involves people!**

God sends Jonah to Nineveh in order that it might be saved. As far as I know, there was no Plan B. Jonah was to go to Nineveh and preach there.

God always uses people to save people. Was Jonah reluctant? Was Jonah rebellious? Was Jonah stubborn? Yes he was! But God got his attention. After spending three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, Jonah went. You see, God's plan for saving people always involves people. There is no Plan B. Jonah was told to go to Nineveh, and eventually, he went. Eventually he did what God asked him to do.

Let me ask you...is God calling you to do something? Have you ever been reluctant? Have you ever been rebellious? Have you ever been stubborn? I know I have. But God has a way to get my attention. What will God have to do to get your attention? What will God have to do to get you to obey Him? Why in the world can't we obey Him without the drama?

God wants to use me to save the world. God wants to use us to save the world. Let us willingly be a part of His plan.

## **3. God's willing to do whatever it takes to save people!**

How far is God willing to go to save the people of Nineveh? He was so intent on their salvation that he would never let go of Jonah. He would never let him off the hook. Jonah was the plan for Nineveh. Jonah needed to go there. Jonah needed to preach there. Jonah needed to witness there. God did what He needed to do to get Jonah there and finally Jonah went.

Jesus is the plan for you and me. God sent Jesus for you and for me. He was not stubborn. He was not rebellious. He came for us willingly.

John 3:16

*"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."*

God's actions speak louder than words. God never let Jesus off the hook. He gave His son for us. Jesus prayed that the cup might pass from Him, but it didn't. God had a plan for our salvation. God was willing to do whatever it took to save you...to save me. He gave us His son.

**PRAYER:**

Lord, help me to pay attention to You. Lord, make me an obedient servant. Lord, help me to stop running to Tarshish. Lord, help me to be a part of Your plan for this world. Help me to be a faithful servant. Help me to be a witness for You. Help me to tell others of Your love. Lord, please don't send a great fish my way. Amen