

God Loves You and I Can't Stand It

Jonah 4
1 Corinthians 9:19-27

February 4, 2018
Faith Community

You may remember, at the beginning of it all, God said to Jonah,

Go to the great city Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me. (Jonah 1:2, TNIV) Jonah's response was to run away.

God loved those people, and wanted Jonah to tell them so, but Jonah didn't care about them at all. They were outsiders, not part of God's Chosen People, and they were sinners, so Jonah would have nothing to do with them.

On board his getaway ship, a furious storm comes up and Jonah gets tossed overboard, but along comes a great fish that swallows him up, and coughs him up on shore of what is believed to have been not far from where he started.

God repeats his marching orders, and this time Jonah obeys. He goes to Nineveh and tells the people what God wants them to hear. They listen. They change their evil ways and the city is transformed.

Boom!
Slam dunk.
Game over.
Mic drop.

But wait. There's more!

There's a reason this sermon is called, "God Loves You and I Can't Stand It!"

Last week I asked you what your Nineveh might be. Who are the 'undeserving' people in your life?

Maybe it's the person who hurt you in some way, and you've never gotten over it. What so-and-so did was unforgivable, you tell yourself, and so you build your walls high and thick.

Maybe your Nineveh is a group of some kind and you cannot stand whatever it is that they stand for, and the harder they push, the hotter you burn.

A political party

A special interest group
People of a certain nationality
The unemployed
The poor
Residents of a certain part of town or even an entire country

Life would be easier if they'd get their acts together or get a job or quit feeling sorry for themselves.

And the voice of God comes to you like it did to Jonah, telling you that God loves those very same people and wants you to tell them so, and you'd do anything but that, and Tarshish sounds like a good place to be.

One of the great take-home points from this amazing Old Testament book of Jonah is this:

Conversion is a matter of the will before it is anything else.

This is why Jonah never got it.

There's an attitude among many people that what's really needed to turn things around is better education. A spin-off of that is if we could just reason with so-and-so they'd come around.

Many of the architects of the Nazi war machine had the finest of educations. The eight leaders of the Killing Fields in Cambodia included a university professor, an economist, and five teachers, all of whom were educated in France, and made some of their plans in quiet, quaint Parisian sidewalk cafes.

Jonah didn't need more education. He got it right when he said,

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. (4:2)

The problem was what he did with that knowledge. He used it to build his own anger and became self destructive in the process. The book ends with a picture of a very successful prophet who nevertheless is broken and bitter because he let his own opinions outweigh the call of God.

Here's the bottom line: Jonah was absolutely right about the people of Nineveh. They did not deserve God's love.

He just didn't take it far enough. He didn't deserve God's love either. No one does. That's because it's a gift. The people of your Nineveh are the same.

- That person who hurt you
- Members of a political party with whom you disagree
- A special interest group
- People of a certain nationality
- The unemployed
- The poor
- Residents of a certain part of town or even an entire country

Those people don't deserve God's love. Neither do you or I. That's because it's a gift.

Friends, do not join in on the political or social or religious rhetoric of the day that enfold you in the rightness of its cause but regards everyone else as residents of Nineveh. It destroyed Jonah. Don't let it happen to you.

The book of Jonah is a cautionary tale for those of us who are so sure of our opinions and convictions that we refuse to think that we just might be missing the point.

Jonah was so convinced of the rightness of his opinions that he went counter to God himself, and finished his story a broken, defeated man who let his opinions lead to his own depression.

Conversion is a matter of the will before it is anything else.

Beware the dreaded hardening of the categories. Jonah's actual message to the people of Nineveh takes just eight words of one verse, while the rest of the book is a study on Jonah himself. The wicked people of Nineveh changed and were filled with joy, while the self-righteous Jonah refused the love of the God he served, and held on to his bitterness.

One final thought. All of the other Old Testament prophets spoke to Israel, the Chosen People. Jonah was called to change that pattern.

Friends, the liveliest churches are those that look beyond themselves and reach out to a hurting world. The word is mission.

Two weeks ago, we lost the whale. That's because the book of Jonah is not about a guy getting swallowed by a whale. Instead, the book of Jonah tells of God's call and the implications of not responding positively to God's call. Most importantly, the book of Jonah tells of the God of the second chance.

As with Jonah, it just might be that the person in greatest need of a second chance is you.