

DEVOTIONALS:

19 - 25 MARCH 2023

Read: Jonah 3



JONAH for lent

The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached" Jonah 3

Jonah Chapter 3 verse one: Then the Lord spoke to Jonah a second time: "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you. This time Jonah obeyed the Lord's command and went to Nineveh."

Jonah was an Old Testament prophet, God told him to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent. He didn't want to, so he got on a ship and headed in the other direction. God sent a storm. Jonah was swallowed by a sea monster, which gave him a change of perspective. He is vomited onto the beach and that's where we find him this week. He's going to have a second chance to do what God told him to do in the first place.

Jonah repented. What does repentance look like?

To "repent" means to "turn around." It's like when you are using a GPS and take a wrong turn. Recalculating route. For a while it usually just tells you to turn around, make a U-Turn. If you don't turn around, eventually you will get so far off track that it will take a different route altogether. I think that's kind of how it is with God, too. We start following Jesus and we're like a little kid, "Where're we going? When are we going to get there? Are we there yet?"

I always told our kids the same thing when they asked that. I said, "We'll be there soon. We'll get there when we get there." Of course, that didn't help at all. They just figured out different ways to ask the same question.

We always want God to tell us exactly what the plan is but He is stubbornly vague. I think God leads us more like a GPS than a Rand McNally folded map. He only tells us the next turn and He won't even do that unless we keep moving.

So, Jonah got his solar powered Garmin Navigation hooked up to his camel and set a course for Nineveh, 500 miles in the exact direction he did not want to go. His internal monologue was probably something like, "Oh goody! Three days in the scorching sun to preach to people who do not want to hear what I have to say". "I have to stand in the public square of my enemies' capital city and tell them all about how God is going to destroy them if they don't stop being mean to everybody".

Oh, boy that sounds exciting; I'm sure it will go really well. Scripture doesn't say Jonah whined and moaned the whole way there but there's a pretty good chance he did. It still wasn't a trip Jonah wanted to take; so, Jonah wasn't in a favorable mood.

Grumpy or not, the mission hadn't changed. Jonah still didn't want to go but he was going to surrender to what God wanted. He had been shown grace, and obedience looked different now. He was a little less selfish. Going to Nineveh wasn't on Jonah's bucket list but life isn't about a bucket list and it's not about our big self-indulgent plans.

Look at it this way, before we were following Jesus, when we were dead in our sin, selfish, wandering around wherever our hunger drove us—we thought it was all about us. Our plans, our dreams, our desires, whatever we thought we wanted, whatever we thought was good for us. The things we want are seldom good for us. The irony is that being self-focused is actually self-destructive.

In the second chapter of Ephesians it says, "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our sin—it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not

from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by our works. For we are God’s handiwork (His masterpiece), created in Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

God gives us faith, God opens our eyes, opens our ears, makes us alive, and invites us to walk with God. As we go, we find there are things God has prepared for us to do. This is where we will actually find freedom. It’s when we focus on God’s plans, and the work God has called us to do that we will find a purpose that will resonate with us. When we repent of our selfish ambitions and embrace God’s plans, God’s dreams and God’s desires, surrendering whatever we thought we wanted for the much more satisfying and meaningful bucket list God has in mind for us. That’s where the abundant life begins.

So, after a month in the desert, Jonah pulled into town, got off his camel and gave the most effective evangelistic message the world has ever known. At the end of his sermon somewhere around 200 thousand Ninevites repented and believed. If you look at numbers alone, it was more effective than any tent revival, more than the apostles in the Book of Acts, even more than Jesus Himself preaching the Good News.

And it worked. In spite of the most “phoned in” message the world has ever known. In spite of him not wanting it to work. In the face of every possible reason why it shouldn’t have worked, “The people of Nineveh believed God’s message.”

They didn’t impale Jonah. They didn’t threaten him. They just believed him. They “turned from their evil ways and stopped all their violence.” They even made their animals fast from eating and drinking and put sackcloth on them. They didn’t want to take any chances; they were hoping God would show them mercy if they repented. God heard them and gave them grace, just like God gave grace to Jonah.

“Arise” – “Go immediately” – God is calling us up out of our slumber into action. Our sinful nature wants us to go down to death. But we fight it with the word of God, standing on His promises. There is joy in walking in faithfulness. And whether or not we move in the direction God calls us to go depends upon whether or not we’ve really gotten a sight of His grace to us.

Like the Apostle Paul who was knocked off his horse by the radiant glory of Jesus on the road to Damascus, we as a church body have walked through a near-death experience. How will you respond?

Let us begin again in light of this grace God has given us!

Next week we’ll find out how Jonah feels about how effective his preaching ministry had been. Spoiler alert: He is not pleased with the results.

Questions for the Week

- Can you share a time when you saw someone right a wrong or brought justice to an unjust situation?
- Read Jonah 3:1-5. How much effort does Jonah make in bringing God’s Word to those in Nineveh? Considering Jonah is a prophet in the Bible, what are the things you think he’s missing from his sermon?
- Read Jonah 3:6-10. Here the king gets down from his power and throne and repents. He then leads others to repent and hope for God’s mercy. Describe a time when you’ve seen someone repent and experience God’s mercy.

Holy God, we would rather proclaim death to our enemies, than see them forgiven and redeemed. Forgive our hardness of heart, O God, and our reluctance to see your divine image in those who hate and despise us. Teach us to love our enemies, that our lives may proclaim your truth—that love is stronger than hate, and mercy is greater than vengeance. We ask this in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.



Fifth Ave. Family and Friends,

With humble acceptance of God's will, we announce the passing of Ms. Barbara Jean Lovensheimer. Ms. Barb was very active in the ministry and programs of her church.

"Eternal God, we praise you for the great company of all those who have finished their course in faith and now rest from their labor. We praise you for those that are dear to us whom we name in our hearts before you. Especially we praise you for Barbara Jean Lovensheimer whose life was a blessing and a gift from your loving heart. Let your perpetual light shine, so that your presence may lead her into the joy of her eternal home. Help your children who are struggling in the darkness of grief and loss find the warmth and care of the Holy Spirit. May they know moments of peace in their pain, moments of joy in their memories, and moments of hope in your everlasting love. In Jesus merciful name we pray. Amen."

Barbara Jean Lovensheimer (nee Paul), 89, of Menomonee Falls WI, died March 11, 2023 at Dickson Hollow Arbor Memory Care where she resided.

She was born April 24, 1933, in Chillicothe OH to Charles R. and Gertrude (Wilhelm) Paul. On August 16, 1953 she married Glenn R. Lovensheimer, who died June 12, 2003. Barbara is survived by her daughter Jayne (Robert) Berthelsen, of Germantown WI; three grandchildren Eric (Courtney) Berthelsen, Jason (Kelly) Berthelsen and Sarah (Bryan) MacKenzie; six great-grandchildren, Leif and Isla Berthelsen, Graham and Grady Berthelsen and Isabel and Benjamin MacKenzie; and sister-in-law Marjorie (Richard) Talbott as well as nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her daughter Deborah Ann Lovensheimer.

Private services were held at Wisconsin Memorial Park, Brookfield WI.

PRAYER & CONCERNS

- We extend our prayers of miraculous and support to **Ms. Ann Cording** as she awaits results from her recent surgery. Great Physician, touch Ms. Ann right now with your healing hands, for we believe that your will is for her to be well in mind, body, soul and spirit. Cover Ms. Ann with the most precious blood of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ from the top of her head to the soles of her feet. Sustain Ms. Ann by your grace, that her strength and courage may not fail. Come fill our loved one from top to toe with your restorative Spirit. May your resurrection life bring healing and wellness into her being. May your grace carry Ms. Ann through this hard time into a new season filled with hope and joy. Cards and notes of love and care can be mailed to: Mrs. Ann Cording, 1416 S. Silverbrook Dr., WB 53095
- **Mr. Brett Barnett** is recovering from hip surgery. We give God thanks and praise and pray that God will bless our brother with God's loving care, renew his strength, and heal what ails him in Jesus loving name. Cards and notes can be mailed to: Mr. Brett and Ms. Mary Barnett, 932 Hillcrest Street, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **We still need YOU! We need leaders and volunteers to serve in various positions on committees and boards. You may not think you have the gift, talent, and/or time to serve, but all are called to work in the kingdom. We need you!**
- Our **church family members and friends** are experiencing all forms of challenges and concerns. "Lord, give me the courage to face the challenges and ills that come. Help me to persevere and not give up. Give me the strength to face these storms. Pour out your peace over me and keep me in your perfect peace. Amen.
- **Bro. Bob Krell**, after spending a couple of days in the hospital, has returned home. He is appreciative for your prayers and cards for renewing of strength and healing. Thank you, God, for hearing and answering my prayer. Please mail cards and notes of support and encouragement to: Bro. Bob and Mrs. Jean Krell, 804 Lenora Drive, West Bend, WI 53090.
- **Ms. Sandy Wamser** having been diagnosed with Epilepsy, is still working with her medical team to find the correct medications and doses to control the seizures. She is very grateful for your love, prayers and support.

Special prayers for Mr. Pat as he cares for Ms. Sandy. Cards and notes can be sent to: Mr. Pat and Mrs. Sandy Wamser, 3742 Pleasant Valley Road, West Bend, WI 53095.

- Our Sweet, Sweet Gentleman, **Mr. Allan Kieckhafer** who passed away on January 25, 2023 was celebrated with a loving, honorable and joyous Celebration of Life Service on 30 January 2023. We have stood on the shoulders of this saintly giant and we give God praise and thanks for all that Mr. Allan taught us, the amazing legacy of service he has left us to live into and the vital a role he played in helping us grow into who we are now. "Almighty Father, you have built up your Church through the love and devotion of your saints: inspire us to follow the example of Mr. Allan whom we grieve his passing. May we, Fifth Ave. United Methodist Church, rejoice with him in the vision of your glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen." We pray for Mr. Allan's family and the community of West Bend. Amen.
- **Ms. Nancy Whitson** is still admitted at The Pavilion at Glacier Valley. She requests your prayers and support as she continues to journey with health concerns. Please send cards and notes of encouragement to: Mrs. Nancy Whitson, 922 Hickory Street, West Bend, WI 53095.
- Words cannot begin to express the heartfelt sadness and grief we are experiencing for the passing of our beloved **Ms. Beverly "Bev" June Vogel**. To Ms. Bev's family: "Always be assured that you have our full support, prayers and love." May God grant us grace, that in pain we may find comfort, in sorrow hope, in death resurrection. Amen.
- **Mr. Don Walters** is still experiencing several medical challenges. We're keeping Ms. Joyce in our thoughts and prayers as well. Letters and notes of encouragement and love can be mailed to: Mr. Don and Mrs. Joyce Walters, 5368 Woodlawn Summit, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Mr. Chuck Rogge** is still on a journey of healing. He is grateful for the cards and notes of support. Please continue to flood the mailbox with love and support to: Mr. Chuck and Mrs. Sue Rogge, 5011 Hwy. P, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Mr. Dick Simmons**, diagnosed with acute leukemia. "Dear God, we place our worries in your hands. We place Mr. Dick's sickness under your care and humbly ask for strength and comfort. Be near him in times of weakness and pain; sustain him by your grace, that Mr. Dick's strength and courage may not fail; give him confidence in the power of your grace, that even when he is afraid, may he put his whole trust in you. We pray all of these things in Your name. Amen. Mr. Dick, Ms. Shirley and family, we are sending you love, hugs, support and prayers during this difficult time. Cards, notes filled with prayers and support can be mailed to: Mr. Dick and Mrs. Shirley Simmons, 2908 Valley Avenue, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Mr. Len McGinnis, Jr.**, continues to quietly face medical challenges. Your cards and notes of support and well wishes for Mr. Len and Mrs. Shelia McGinnis can be mailed to: 1230 Vogt Drive, West Bend, WI 53095.
- **Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf**, appreciates your continued prayers for healing and strength as she continues to struggle with illness. You can send emails of prayers and support to: alankempf33@gmail.com; or cards and notes to Mrs. Janice Liepert-Kempf, 414B. South Pleasantview Road, Plymouth, WI 53073; phone number: 920.838.1830.

Prayer: "Lord, you have come to the lakeshore, looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones. You only ask me to follow humbly. (UMH #344 - Lord, You Have come to the Lakeshore). The words from this lovely hymn paint pictures of hard-working people, going about their daily tasks when they are confronted by Jesus. This same Jesus, who long ago called to those first disciples, calls to us each today. Our "lakeshores" are different. They are the places where we work and where we live. Yet in this song, Jesus is coming for each one of us, just as we are and inviting us to follow him humbly. We have lifted the names of loved ones today in prayerful petition for God's healing love. We have uttered in our hearts names and situations that it would break our hearts to speak. And God hears all our cries and responds in love. This is one of the faithful works of the church; the work of prayer, asking for God's healing mercy and blessings. As we have offered our prayers, let us also offer our lives, trusting in God's love and call to us, responding with confidence. For it is in Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Pastor Clarissa & Bro. Martin