

January 25, 2015
 Sermon for the Third Sunday after Epiphany
 St Peter Lutheran Church
 Bowie, TX
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor
 Jonah 3:1-10

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Jonah 3:1-10 (ESV)

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

⁶ The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸ but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

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¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version.* Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

If you think back, five years ago, I preached a Lenten series about Jonah and how he ran from God, and how even though Jonah did everything to avoid it, God used him to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh.

A lot of the things we talked about back then came to mind as I looked at the Old Testament reading for this morning.

No matter how often Jonah tried to run away, God kept calling, No matter how much he rebelled against the idea of even trying to speak to the Ninevites, God insisted and made sure that His Word was delivered.

God keeps calling! He never gives up on Jonah, or us!
Jonah's second call is the result of his "saltwater baptism".

When he ran, was thrown into the sea, he passed through the waters "safely" into the great fish's mouth and stomach. He cried out in the prayer in Chapter Two of the book of Jonah *"And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land."* (Jonah 2:10)

Jonah was brought by God, out of death, through the waters and into life. And in great thanksgiving, even before he hit the beach, Jonah prayed the prayer of the Psalms, taken from Psalm 50 and Psalm 3.

"But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (Jonah 2:9)

Jonah received that second chance from the second call, as the fish vomited him out onto dry ground. Doesn't sound very appealing, but either drowning in the depths of the sea or being digested inside a fish...I think I could take being vomited out on the beach.

As he was given that second chance, Jonah goes to Nineveh and offers them the same second chance. He didn't think they would listen, he didn't think they deserved it and he really didn't want to go... but this time he followed God's command.

Jonah survived only through the God's grace, and so do we because our God in Christ is the God of the second chance!

But recognizing a mistake without doing an about face by changing, doesn't really make a difference.

A husband and wife are in a car, and the map says to turn right at the next red light, and by mistake, he turns left. When he realizes what he has done, he says to his wife "I'm sorry love, I went the wrong way."

But if that is all he does, it isn't enough. His saying sorry isn't getting them any closer to where they want to be; it isn't even stopping them from getting further away.

To get where they want to be, he needs to stop the car, turn it around and go back on to the correct road that his wife told him to take in the first place.

That is repentance; it is an about-face!

The people of Nineveh are a powerful, arrogant, violent, wicked people. Jonah is a little guy from a weak nation at the edge of their quickly growing empire.

They might have strung him up from condemning their fine city. But they don't. They listen to him.

Mind you, it might be easier to listen to a prophet who has recently spent the last three days in the belly of a fish. I imagine he was a sight and carried quite a smell, but whatever the reason...they listened!

Whether Jonah showed up like that, or he cleaned himself up a little before arriving, the people hear his message and believe it. They recognize that they have been doing great evil, and they repent. Just Like That.

While we see just a little regret in Jonah for his disobedience, his flight from God in his request to be thrown overboard, and his prayer in the belly of the fish, -- the Ninevites are the ones who demonstrate the greatest example of corporate repentance that we find in the Bible.

They hear Jonah and spontaneously respond in faith. They declare a fast, they remove their clothes, put sackcloth on their bodies and ashes on their heads and go about mourning. This fast of regret and mourning is complete in that from the least person in the city, to the greatest, they all fast.

Even the king, when he hears the news of their impending doom, gets off his throne, removes his royal robes, puts on sackcloth, and sits down in the dust. In all humility and contrition, he trades his robes for rags and his throne for the dirt.

He sets a royal decree that wasn't needed. He told the people to do what they were already doing; to fast and wear rags. He extends the fast not just to people, but to the animals as well. Nineveh goes from this powerful, arrogant, wicked city to become a city of massive mourning. You couldn't hear yourself think in Nineveh in those days! Have you ever heard a hungry cow? All of Nineveh's cows and sheep and horses would have been complaining loudly, the people would have been sitting in the streets calling out to God to forgive them, babies would have been crying for their mothers to feed them! What racket!

But more importantly, and should even speak louder than the bellowing, hungry cow, God empowers a change of heart, and a change in behavior. The king doesn't just call the people to fast and mourn, he calls for a change in behavior. A Change in their lives! He says in v. 8: *"Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands."*

The Ninevites repent and believe.

Why? The proclamation of God's Word.

It is God who empowered an about-face among all the people.

J. Edwin Orr, a professor of Church history has described the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the Welsh Revivals of the nineteenth century. As people repented they did all they could to confess their wrong-doing and to make restitution. But it unexpectedly created serious problems for the shipyards along the coast of Wales. Over the years workers had stolen all kinds of things, from wheelbarrows to hammers. However, as people repented, they started to return what they had taken, with the result that soon the shipyards of Wales were overwhelmed with returned property. There were such huge piles of returned tools that several of the yards put up signs that read, "If you have been led by God to return what you have stolen, please know that the management forgives you and wishes you to keep what you have taken."

Can you imagine if that type of repentance came upon our country? Or even our town? What a miracle. We couldn't even imagine it.

The repentance that we see in Nineveh is nothing short of a miracle.

It is impossible even to imagine that Nineveh would repent at the sound of this reluctant prophet's voice.

A miracle that could only be wrought by the Holy Spirit, but remember, nothing is impossible for God.

In the same way, when we repent of our sin, it is a miracle in our hearts that we have heard the gospel and responded positively.

Yes, it is a miracle that you too believe by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nineveh's change evoked the LORD'S change; changing His decree from condemnation to grace, finally for the sake of Christ.

What an awesome and life-giving about face!!!
That same change in our heart means we survive too! No longer are we bound to sin and condemnation. Through Christ, we are given that second chance.

In closing, I'd like to share one more story. I shared this same story back in 2010, but it warrants repeating.

Author Ken Sande tells the story of Thomas Edison's and his staff when they were developing the incandescent light bulb, it took hundreds of hours to manufacture a single bulb.

One day, after finishing a bulb, Edison handed it to an errand boy and asked him to take it upstairs to the testing room. As the boy turned and started up the stairs, he stumbled and fell, and the bulb shattered on the steps. Instead of rebuking the boy, Edison reassured him and then turned to his staff and told them to start working on another bulb. When it was completed several days later, Edison demonstrated the reality of his forgiveness in the most powerful way possible. He walked over to the same boy, handed him the bulb, and said, "Please take this up to the testing room." Imagine how that boy must have felt. I can imagine that he was a nervous wreck.

And I do not doubt that Edison was also a nervous wreck.

But that is not how it is with you and God! When God forgives the past, it is gone.

There is no nervousness. There is no worry: 'What if I mess up again?' There is only the peace and joy of knowing that the past is forgiven and the future is full of the promise of our crucified and resurrected Savior, Jesus Christ, who creates all things, including you, all brand new!

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the glory

Sermon Outline

God's Second Chances...

Jonah 3:1-10

1. Recognizing a mistake is not changing a mistake.
2. Doing an "about-face".
3. A God enabled "about-face".