

Midweek Lent 3 Lent 2022 40 Theme

Jonah 3:1-10 NIV ~ Jonah Goes to Nineveh

Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth... When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

There's a lot more to Jonah than THE BIG FISH.

Jonah is about saving the people of Israel – yes Israel – the Ninevites got saved in the process – but it's all about Israel – God's chosen people – therefore it's about us.

Israel was in a dark place – as always.

Are we in a dark place?

Are we at risk of losing our faith and trust in Jesus?

Israel was in such a bad way that God was going to allow them to be – carried away to a strange land called Babylon.

They had turned their back on God.

They turned from God to King Jeroboam II.

Jeroboam was a brilliant leader – he made Israel powerful and very wealthy.

The Israelites became besties with the Phoenicians, the Egyptians, and the Assyrians. Jeroboam built temples all over Israel – temples where they could worship Baal and Molech.

Baal worship was easy – it's fertility worship – basically sex with temple prostitutes – male and female – the more sex, the more rain, the better crops.

Jeroboam built Asherah poles all over the countryside, even inside God's temple in Jerusalem.

Asherah poles are mentioned right through the Old Testament – symbols of the male sex organ.

The command of God in Exodus:

"Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles." [Exodus 34:13 \(NIV\)](#)

The command of Jeroboam:

Worship Asherah under these poles.

Israel was a cesspit.

They also worshipped Molech – the deplorable god who demanded children to be sacrificed.

I suppose with fertility worship and a total breakdown of society there were plenty of unwanted Children who could be thrown into the fire of Molech.

It was an evil situation?

This was God's Israel of 785 BC

Is there anything as evil today?

What should God do?

Can't send a flood – he promised he wouldn't do that again.

Let them die in the desert – done that - that didn't work.

What to do.

He sends Jonah from evil Israel to Nineveh way up north in Iraq.

Shouldn't someone from Nineveh be sent to Israel?

Well the Ninevites were no angels either.

Nina-veh is named after Nina the goddess of sex and lust.

The prophet Nahum said Nineveh was a city of prostitutes run by witches.

He tells how the Ninevites made pyramids out of the heads of their enemies.

He tells how the city was filthy rich – all robbed from their enemies.

So we have God sending a very reluctant prophet, Jonah, from the evil city of Jerusalem to the EVIL city of Nineveh.

It's just too strange?

You know there're some simple facts.

If you turn your back on God you die – eternally!

If you turn to God, that's repent, you live –eternally!

The Israelites were about to die – die eternally – a self-inflicted death.

And God sends a prophet to Nineveh???

By sending a prophet to Nineveh and not to Israel one would think that God wanted his people to die – would you blame him?

But God says in Ezekiel: *I have no pleasure in the death of anyone so repent and live.*

Repentance is the key to life – to turn from evil toward God.

To be sorry for wrong and ask for God's love and forgiveness – is life.

- Repentance is knowing and trusting God will forgive you.
- Repentance is God calling you back to him to be right with him.

Jonah goes to Nineveh because God is desperate for Israel.

When the power of God's word changes the bloodthirsty hearts of Ninevites he has high hopes for Israel.

Nineveh, hears Jonah's call – you've got 40 days to repent or die.

That's the turning point – every man, woman, child, even the animals repent.

Nineveh is a new city – a city now turned to God.

Guess what, because Nineveh turned to God at least 3 prophets, Amos, Joel, and Hosea all from up the north - have a living message for Israel.

And their message to the people of Israel is simple: "look at God's grace to the people of Nineveh – they are not even his chosen people and they have been saved by his call to repent"

“The Ninevites were going to be destroyed – but now they live.”

Can you see how God needed to save Nineveh so he could save Israel?

I worked on a farm like that once.

You had to get a battery and diesel to start the tractor so that you could use the tractor to pull start the truck.

Jonah and what happened to the people of Nineveh was God’s desperate attempt to save the people of Israel.

This whole message of Jonah is God’s desperate attempt to save us.

Repent or die – turn to Jesus and live.

God’s whole history is wanting to save his people from their sins – they call it Heilsgeschichte auf Deutsch – salvation history.

God wants all people to be in a right relationship with him.

God tried and tried. He knew a prophet from Israel would be rejected and killed.

So He sent Amos, Joel, and Hosea from the north so that some might be saved – and some were saved.

Those who rejected their ended up in Babylon.

Why to suffer and die?

No, they were sent to a strange land so that they would sit by the rivers of Babylon and cry as they remembered Zion.

That time in Babylon – that crying saved them – they repented – they were rescued.

The whole Jonah, big fish thing, the second chance, Calling Nineveh to repent was, to save his beloved Israel.

You remember what Israel means don’t you? The people God struggles with – the people God puts up with every day.

Jewish people hate that – they like “the chosen race” thing – Israel means the people God struggles with every day.

You know what Christian means?

It means the people I have tried everything in my power to save from death with no success – so I allowed my son Jesus to die for them.

Christian means: the depth of God’s love for us in the death of Jesus his only beloved son.

Isn’t it a blessing that the people God loves and chooses are the most are the stubborn , fickle, hard hearted people you can imagine.

What a God of grace who will pursue the worst of people to make them his own?

God chose Israel because it was “the least of all nations” it says, with the most “stubborn, fickle, hard hearts” on earth, it says.

That’s good news for me – what about you.

You would think Jesus could win people over?

In John: "He came to his own but his own did not receive him".

His own people killed him, in their own city, in their own country.

It was the gentiles, the pagans, the Auslander's, who repented of their old ways and turned to Jesus and new ways.

Where is our mission?

Jesus made inroads with the Gentiles, the pagans, the Auslander's.

Did you know today is much like the days of Jonah – it is the Asians and Africans who are sending missionaries to the Western world.

Did you know we have one Australian Lutheran Pastor in New Guinea today – a pastor from Bow Hill his mum is here tonight.

Years ago we Had dozens of missionaries up there.

Did you know there are 25 New Guineans in Pinaroo at the moment - imported to work on the Potato farm – they are Lutherans.

On their first day they built a tent church – they are reviving Pinaroo.

Do we, the church at large need someone from Nineveh, from Africa, From Asia, from New Guinea, to save us with a message of repentance – change.

- It's no surprise that Jesus very first word in ministry was "repent" – come back.
- It's no surprise that John the Baptist very first word in ministry was "repent" – come back.
- It's no surprise that the very first command, in the very first sermon, to the very first congregation in Acts, was repent and be baptised everyone of you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Repent and live and enabling and loving command of Jesus.

Throw away that which brings you down – that which separates you from God.

Turn off that which holds your attention.

Give away that which takes your time.

The devil will say one more day is OK – one more this – one more that won't hurt.

Jesus says repent today, turn away, throw away, turn it off, and live.

An enabling and loving command.

Listen well, that command may well come from someone in Nineveh, New Guinea, Vanuatu.

Lord bless us with ears to hear you call to repent. Give us the humility to repent both personally and corporately as a church, as a nation. Amen.