

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Fishing with Jonah (Week 4) - I Really Love This Plant:



1) If the book of Jonah were a feel-good Netflix movie or a bestselling Christian book, it would end with chapter 3, and its climactic revival in Nineveh...but it doesn't.

2) Like Jonah in 4.1-3, so often in the spiritual life we end up quarreling with God about God (and quarreling with God is a pretty common activity among the faithful in the Old Testament).

3) So often our problem is how gracious and merciful God is, and to whom (it angered Jonah that God was showing His covenantal, steadfast love to the people who, in his mind, least deserved it - Nineveh/Assyria).

4) Too often, just like Jonah sitting alone east of the city watching to see what might happen next, we're waiting for God to judge or punish, instead of waiting for how His grace and mercy will show up.

5) Jonah 4 is exceedingly insightful about our anger - where it originates (inside of us, not provoked outside of us), and how it affects us.

6) First, does our anger reveal that we might care too much about small things, and not enough about the really big things (see the contrast between Jonah being angered about Nineveh's repentance and how much he loved his shade plant)?

7) Second, how would we respond if God asked us what He did Jonah twice in chp. 4: "Is your anger right?" which can also be understood as, "Is your anger doing anything good?"

8) As we see in Jonah, anger hopes for the worst, whereas love hopes for the best (1 Cor. 13.7).

9) Third, has our stubborn, intractable anger effectively resigned us to a self-imposed exile, like Jonah under his little booth east of the city?

10) The book ends with no real resolution, a kind of cliffhanger, similar to the parable of the Prodigal Son with the character of the older brother: the reader (you and I) are meant to ask ourselves, "I wonder how Jonah responded?" and, "I wonder what I'd do if I were him."

Living in Jonah 4 This Week

1) Quotes to digest:

1a) Here's the long quote from Eugene Peterson about Jonah 4 that was a springboard for our own reflection yesterday:

"Quarreling with God is a time-honored biblical practice: Moses, Job, David, and St. Peter were all masters at it...We get a lot of practice in this because...God doesn't behave the way we expect.

Jonah is quarreling because he has been surprised by grace. He is so taken aback that he is disagreeable about it. His idea of what God is supposed to do and what God in fact does differ radically. Jonah sulks and he is angry – the word "anger" appears six times in the final chapter.

Anger is most useful as a diagnostic tool. When anger erupts in us, it is a signal that something is wrong and isn't working right...Anger is our sixth sense for sniffing out wrong in the neighborhood. Diagnostically speaking, it is virtually infallible, and we learn to trust it. Anger is infused by a moral/spiritual intensity that carries conviction: when we are angry, we know we are on to something that matters, or that really counts...

What anger fails to do, though, is tell us whether the wrong is outside or inside of us. We usually begin by assuming that the wrong is outside of us – our spouse or our children or our God has done something wrong, and we are angry about it...But when we track the anger carefully, we often find it leads to a wrong within us – wrong information, inadequate understanding, underdeveloped heart. If we admit and face that, we are pulled out of our quarrel with God and into something far larger and better – what Christ would call the Kingdom."

1b) Here's how Old Testament scholar John Bruckner lays out the prophet's fourfold anger with God in Jonah 4:

"Jonah's displeasure with God is based on at least four related perspectives:

- God should not be the kind of God who forgives violence and violent people, even if they repent. Evil should be punished, not forgiven.
- Justice requires that people suffer the full consequences of their actions, whether they repent or not.
- Nineveh had been too evil too long for their repentance to be true, and for them to receive forgiveness.
- Living faithfully loses its positive value if evil people are forgiven through simple repentance. Struggling to obey daily looks foolish if forgiveness is given so freely."

2) Scripture reading this week:

- In Jonah 4, God does play within the boundaries of our own human definition of "friend" and "enemy"...Jesus addresses that at the end of Matthew 5:

[Matthew 5.43-48 NRSV](#)

- Jesus tells a parable about what we observe in Jonah 4: someone who was forgiven much not being willing to exercise that same forgiveness to others:

[Matthew 18.23-35 NRSV](#)

3) Diagnosing your anger this week:

Do the empty chair exercise this week (mentioned in the sermon) in regard to your anger. (Use a pen and paper, if it helps.)

Focus your attention on the following three questions, drawn from Jonah 4:

- Are you angry about small things, which may be diverting your attention from much more important things?
- Is your anger right?
- Has your stubborn, intractable anger exiled you?

Let your rhythm be periods of voicing you anger, and then listening quietly for God's reply, poke, or fresh insight.