

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Fishing with Jonah (Week 1): West is not East:



1) For such a short book (45 verses in total), Jonah has a lot to say: it's a fun, entertaining story, that also speaks with great depth and insight to human nature, God, the spiritual life, and mission.

2) We see in Jonah that when God calls us to go east, sometimes we instinctually want to go due west (Nineveh, to which God is calling Jonah, was some 620 miles east of his location, whereas Tarshish, his destination, was about 2400 miles west).

3) One of the most dangerous things any of us can pray is "God, speak to me," or "God, call me" because you never know what you might hear in response.

4) Like Jonah, when we run away from how God directs us, we can end up acting like a petulant child, irrational (like trying to flee from the presence of a God who is "Lord of the land and sea," see 1.3, 9) and exceedingly stubborn (like attempting to commit suicide instead of simply acknowledging an error and repenting, see 1.12).

5) But, rest assured, as we see in Jonah 1, "Humans can certainly flee from God, but they cannot escape Him," as the great theologian Karl Barth put it.

6) Like Jonah, we run when we fear what God is asking us to do, or when our disdain for a particular person or group gets in the way (1.3).

7) Because so much of the Christian life is to embrace and include, when we resist the nudge of God's Spirit, we need to dig deeper and seek to expose the fear or bias that lies beneath.

8) The person most wronged in Jonah 1 is God Himself: by the time we get to the scene on the deck of that storm-tossed ship (1.11-16), Jonah is completely misrepresenting who God is, e.g., that God is trying to kill Jonah, and that He would be satiated if Jonah were to offer himself as a human sacrifice by being thrown overboard.

9) The lesson here is that every step away from God is a step closer to a skewed, incongruent understanding of Him.

10) Our spiritual sight is like our visual acuity: the closer we stand to someone, the clearer we can see them (or, in this case, God), and, conversely, the farther we move away, the more we can mistake their traits or even identity.

Quote to Remember

From "Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love" (by William H. Willimon, professor and former chaplain at Duke Divinity School):

"Comedian Eddie Murphy once complained about folk who brag how much they love their families, 'That's your job!' Of course I love my wife, my children; they look like me. When I have loved the Other, as Christ has loved me in my otherness and hostility, then that's a specifically Christian, countercultural, virtually miraculous love. There is a high price to be paid for fearing the threat of the Other more than we fear disappointing Jesus."

More to Explore

1) There's more to digest in Jonah 1, specifically the sailors and their contrast to Jonah himself. (Hint - in quite the intended ironic turn, they end up coming off way better than Jonah does.)

Revisit Jonah 1, and see what you can glean from the juxtaposition of Jonah with the sailors:

[Jonah 1 NRSV](#)

2) Want to read part of the Old Testament you might have never looked at before? Try Nahum, written to decry the wickedness of Nineveh/Assyria (see Jonah 1.2): [Nahum 1 NRSV](#)

3) In effect, God's call to Jonah was to go and love his nation's enemy. This then points us forward to how Jesus Himself articulated that same truth (Matthew 5.43-48). Here's a 10 minute excerpt from a sermon on that subject, given in 1957 by the great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

[Martin Luther King Jr. Love Your Enemies Speech](#)

4) Here's a prayer for the week:

INSPIRED BY JONAH 1 (B. J. BEU – MINISTRY MATTERS):

Holy God, sometimes I would rather proclaim judgment upon those I distrust and scorn rather than see them redeemed and transformed.

Forgive my hardness, O God, and my reluctance to acknowledge Your love for those who condemn and work against me.

I lay at Your feet my hesitations, unwillingness, anger, and fears about other people I may not know, understand, or even like, for these attitudes and feelings impede Your reconciling work in the world.

Teach me to love both strangers and enemies, so that my life may proclaim that love is stronger than hate, and mercy is greater than vengeance.

I humbly ask all of this in the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.