



Sunday, December 4, 2022

Sunday Sermon: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Jonah 1:1-17, 3:1-10

Sermon: An Invitation to Honest Humility

Arlene spoke of hope, a hope which God invites us to at His table. This morning, you are invited to come to the table which Christ has prepared for us. Later on, we are going to speak about Jonah, the life of Jonah, and how Jonah displays grace.

Jesus in **Matthew 12:39-41** says, "**39** But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. **40** For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. **41** The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here."

Jesus says to us this morning, "I invite you to, in your own way, humbly ask God for forgiveness." Then Jesus says, "I give it to you." When Jesus, just before He died, met with His disciples that is what's known as the Last Supper, they fellowshiped together. They had a meal together and they discussed all the things that were going on in their lives. At the end of that meal, Jesus said, "I have a word for you. I want you to remember that as you live, remember the grace that I've extended to you in my death."

The Lord's Supper

And Jesus took bread and He broke it. [Pastor John breaks the loaf of bread.] He said, "Just like the sign of Jonah, is a sign for me dying, being buried for three days and resurrecting. This bread is a sign of the covenant which I make with you in my death. When you take the bread, you remember my death and you remember the grace that I've given you." After supper, He also took the cup. [Pastor John pours juice into the cup.] When He had taken the cup, He gave thanks for it and He said, "This I do because I love you. I shed my blood for you so that you may receive the grace of God."

So this morning, no matter where you come from, Jesus invites you to his table. He says, "Come, fellowship with me, eat with me, commune with me, accept my grace, that you may have life."

The elders pass out the bread to the congregation.

Jesus invites you to lay down your hurt, to accept His grace, to come as you are, and receive from Him the gift that He has given to you. Take this bread. It's a sign of His body that He shed for you. When He died on the cross, He gave His life so that we may have life. Take it, eat it. Remember and believe that Jesus died for the complete remission of all your sins. [Pastor John and the congregation eat bread.]

The elders pass out the juice to the congregation.

Jesus took the cup and He said, "This is my blood, my life blood which I've given for you, so that you may have life." He invites us to lay down everything that we have at the foot of the cross and accept His grace, His gift of life for you and for me. Take it, drink all of it. Remember and believe that Jesus' blood is a symbol and a sign of complete remission of sins from now and forever, drink it. [Pastor John and the congregation drink juice.]

Join me in prayer. Dear Lord, we thank You for Your gift of life. We thank You, Lord, for the death and the resurrection which gives us life. Lord, may we accept Your grace. May we live a life, Lord, which shows the acceptance of that grace as well. Lord, thank You. We love you Lord, because You first loved us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What a gift it is to be together, to be able to worship our Lord together, to celebrate His communion, and to receive God's grace. Today we're going to look at the story of Jonah. As we look at the book of Jonah, we're going to look at just a couple of chapters. It's hard to do Jonah without doing all of Jonah and it's also hard to not just dig real deep into each chapter of Jonah because there's so much there, but we're going to take a couple of thoughts out of Jonah today.

I invite you to turn to Jonah. We'll read parts of chapter one and parts of chapter three. We'll look at a little bit of chapter two and four as well. What we're going to look at is how Jonah fits into the aspect of inviting others into knowledge of God and of faith. In Jonah chapter one, we have the story of him on the ship. In Jonah chapter three, we have the story of him at Nineveh. Both times proclaiming God's Word.

Some of us might think, "That's great, it's a great story, we'll get into it, and there's lots that we can learn there. But where does that fit into Advent?" We don't normally talk about Jonah when we talk about the coming of Christ. But there are things that we will see in Jonah, which will show us the importance of sharing God's Word and how God works through you to invite others to come to Him. As Mike said earlier, the theme for this Advent is the aspect of invitation. There are actually two invitations that we're going to see today. The invitation from Christ to us - but then also the invitation which Christ says, "I give you an invitation that I want you to send to others and to invite them."

At the beginning of the service, we talked about our December 24 Christmas Eve service. There are many people within our neighborhoods who go to church once, maybe twice a year, and Christmas is one of those open opportunities. So as you listen today to the story of Jonah, I want you to also be thinking about who it is that I need to invite to church.

To give you a little bit of encouragement, Mike found a video which shows and tells the story of a number of people whose lives were changed by an invitation to come to church. I invite you to watch that video and then we will dig into Jonah.

Video

Speaker 1: You know, we were forced to go to church, pretty much. We grew up like that.

Speaker 2: When we went to church, that was pretty strict for me.

Speaker 3: A lot of the rules that came along with church just felt like these like, you know, who do I need to be in order to be loved?

Speaker 2: This is how you have to dress. This is how you have to behave.

Speaker 4: I can remember running around in the pews at our old Baptist church in Chicago. My dad was leading worship and stuff like that. So it's always been a part of my life even sometimes if it was at a distance.

Speaker 3: When I got into high school, I didn't really feel that connection to church.

Speaker 1: If you lived in mom's house, you went to church. The day I moved out was the last time I went to church.

Speaker 2: I decided to stop around 12 years old, I felt I was big enough to make my own decisions and say, "This is not for me."

Speaker 4: I knew a lot of ministers and ministries and pastor and things like that, you know, and so you go to a church on Sunday, but what happened between Monday through Saturday, sometimes you get a little jaded or disillusioned by that.

Speaker 3: I left and explored life in all that it had to offer.

Speaker 2: I didn't feel I belonged in a church. I've pretty much done any kind of drug that you can do.

Speaker 3: I still had this anxiety and depression inside. So the things that I turned to were alcohol and marijuana.

Speaker 2: I was really looking for something else or trying to find a meaning or something all my life, which I never found.

Speaker 3: My brother for sure was the front door for me because I had such a close relationship with him growing up.

Speaker 1: My daughter, Stormy, started going to church continuously when she was probably 14.

Speaker 2: I'm a plumber and I get to the house and I lay out the blueprints and there are people there. I'm like, "What are these people doing?" And they're like, "We can do miracles, like, come on." There was a guy standing beside me and he's like, "Well, I'm the owner of the house." And I was like, "Oh my gosh." I just wanted to be swallowed up right there.

Speaker 3: My brother came to me saying, "Ashley, you've got to check out this church." He was excited about it. I was like, "Okay, this is something."

Speaker 2: [inaudible]. Owner asked me, "Do you want to go to church?"

Speaker 1: It took us about three years before we said, "Yeah, we'll come in with you." And I got saved.

Speaker 4: Growing up in church is just a part of your life and it feels like it's something you didn't have the choice, but that invite really got me serious about going because it was my choice at that point.

Speaker 2: The more that I go to church, the more that I get close to God. I realize that He is watching over me.

Speaker 3: I think being in community with the church, it's really really one of the most beautiful gifts that God has for us.

Speaker 1: The only time in my life that I really believe that I have brothers and sisters and true friends. Continue to keep asking no matter how many times they say no, don't ever give up. I don't know where I'd be right now if Stormy had given up on me.

The last gentleman in the video said, "No matter how many times it takes, keep asking." We'll see today in the story of Jonah how asking makes a difference. Sometimes you get called to ask. Sometimes it drops in your lap, and it's just there. So before we get to the actual passage, I kind of just want to tell the story of Jonah. I think most of us are familiar with it. I just want to remind us of the main facts.

You can do the 30 second Jonah's story... God said, "Go." Jonah said no. Got in a storm. Over the side. Swallowed by a fish. Thrown up on shore. God said, "Go." Jonah said okay. Went to Nineveh. God said, "Repent." (Well, he didn't actually say those words. We'll talk about that.) Ninevites repented. Jonah got mad that they repented. God gave him a vine. A worm ate the vine. Jonah got mad again. And God ends with, "Should I not care about that city and their animals?" That's the quick story of Jonah.

But we want to go into the story of Jonah and look at Jonah's heart. What is God inviting Jonah, and also inviting us to, within this story? So we're going to look specifically at chapters one and three. And we'll pull in chapters two and four, as I said, but we'll look at chapters one and three and we're going to see how the two of them are very closely tied together. And yet, there is a completely different attitude and person which appears in both.

Last week for those of you who were here or who watched online, we had Tony Posthumus here, and he talked about the importance of loving all people. There's nobody in this world that God does not say, "You are mine and I created you in my image." So to put the story of Jonah in perspective, we need to remember who Jonah is. We read about Jonah in the time of Jeroboam the second, one of the kings of Israel, and Jonah was the prophet at that time. He also helped that king grow in his establishment as a country. It was very successful. And God says to Jonah, "Jonah, I want you to go to Nineveh - that capital city of your enemy. I want you to go there and tell them that their evil has come up in front of the face of God and they need to repent."

Jonah's response of course is, "Why would I want to go to my enemy?" Last week, Tony reminded us that it is not a matter of whether it is your enemy or not. It is a matter of who God created this person to be. So let's look at the first two verses of Jonah chapter one. It says, **"1** The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: **2** "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." Now I want you to flip over to chapter three. Here we're going to read verses one and two there. It says, **"1** Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: **2** "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

You may notice they are almost word for word the same. In fact, in Hebrew, there are three verbs that appear in each of these verses. The first one is "arise" or "get up." In the NIV, it doesn't include that piece. But there is this aspect of, "You need to get up." Then the second one is "to go." And the third one is "proclaim" or "tell" or "call out against." "Give them the news." So there is within Jonah's life two times - and it even says that in chapter three - it appeared to Jonah the second time. God says, "Arise, go, and tell."

The first time, Jonah refuses - and if we go back to chapter one, it says, **3** "But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish." Just for geography sake, if Nineveh is over here, [Pastor John steps to the left of the stage] Tarsus is over here [Pastor John steps to the furthest right of the stage]. It is as far away from Nineveh as you can get. And it says here that he ran away from the Lord.

In Hebrew in this place, it says that he ran away from the face of God. That's an important piece to grasp because when you are in a relationship with somebody, you look them face to face and you have conversations with them. So Jonah is turning away from the face of God to go away someplace else. And he heads for Tarsus.

Then we have the story of the storm and everything that happens, but there's something very unique about the way this is written. You'll notice that up to verse nine, Jonah has not spoken at all. It has been the narrator. It has been the sailors. Jonah, the main character of this book, has not spoken until verse nine. With verse nine it says, **9** "He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." That is significant. In Hebrew writing, when you look at the way it's written, the first time the main character speaks, it is usually the thesis of the book. This is super important, and this is Jonah's identity. He is a Hebrew who worships God.

Now, we may think that Jonah was one of these people who it's like, "Well, it's just somebody we don't really know much about." But Jonah was a good Hebrew. Jonah knew all the rules. Jonah was like the men and women in the video we just watched who said, "We grew up, we knew the rules, and we did them. And when we had our chance to leave, we did." Jonah knew all the rules. He had done all the right things.

Then God says, "Go to Nineveh." And Jonah's like, "Hold on. That's one too many. I'm leaving." And he fled. But notice what else he says, "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." He is right now in the middle of a storm. And if you read a few verses earlier, you see that the sailors are crying out to the sea god. And Jonah, in this verse, says, "I worship the God who created the Hayam." To which all the sailors would go, "Oh, that's our sea god and he created the dry ground." So Jonah has now established that there is one God who has created all the other gods that these people worship. And he has established that. Jonah has declared himself as one who worships God.

We then see the sailors' response, "Pray to your God, get this to stop." Jonah understands at that point what is happening. Jonah realizes that he has run away from the face of God and God's anger is there. Jonah has two responses. He could, with them, try to bail out the boat, throw everything overboard, and pretend that this is something that they're going to try to have to just work through. Or he could say, "God, I am throwing my life into your hands. I will accept your anger at sin and I will trust that you will be there." So Jonah tells them to throw him overboard.

Notice they don't right away say, "Hold on, there's got to be a better plan. Maybe if we get rid of a little bit more cargo, then we'll be okay." And finally they say, "Lord, God of heaven, we don't know who you are but please don't hold this against us." They throw him overboard and the seas calm down. God is in control of the sea.

Jonah goes overboard. Jonah had no idea what would happen next. Jonah just knew that he had given himself to God, no matter what. As Jonah went overboard, God already had His love under the water ready for Jonah to land, and for grace to be accepted. It says at the end of chapter one, the beginning of chapter two, that Jonah was swallowed by a large fish. We can talk for a long time about whether that's possible or not possible and there have been studies that show it has. That's not the point. The point is, is that God provided for Jonah when Jonah accepted his own sin, and said, "Lord, I give myself to you for that."

Then in chapter two, we see Jonah's prayer while he's in the belly of the fish, and he prays about his own weaknesses, about how he left. But when he turns back to the temple, he sees God's sacrifice. You'll notice that it says that he turns toward the temple in the end of verse four, "4 Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple." What happens at the temple? The temple is the place where sacrifices are made for the redemption of sin. Jonah knows that the only way for him to be forgiven is through that sacrifice.

This morning, we celebrated the Lord's Supper in which Jesus says, "I am the ultimate sacrifice, I am the final sacrifice. I am the one who forgives your sin." So what Jonah is proclaiming to us today, he is saying, "If we're in this space where we know that we have broken away from the face of God, God is sending us an invitation." He is saying, "Look it straight in the face, jump in and do whatever it takes to solve it, knowing that I have your grace and love already in that space for you to land."

That doesn't mean it went all great for Jonah. I know in the kids' books when Jonah is sitting in the belly of the whale, there he sits and it's all nice and everything else, right? Some even had him there with a little fire and roasting there. It's like, "No, that's not what it was like. It was a mess." Jonah didn't know that was going to come. But at that time, he prayed and he looked to the place of the sacrifice and he said, "I know that the sacrifice has been made for my sin as well." It is not until we are honestly humble with ourselves in our own situations, that we are really able to experience the grace of God.

Some of us might be at a place this morning where we go, "You know, actually I'm doing pretty good. I don't do anything really bad. God can't be totally upset with me." Jesus says to us this morning, "Even *that* shows an aspect of pride and we need to get rid of it." We need to be honest with ourselves in who we are in our sinful being and say, "God, I need you."

Some of us might be in a place where you go, "I'm so bad, God could never love me. I've done so much and I've been told by so many people that I am worthless, that God has no place for me." "I've been told by my parents or by loved ones saying, "You are no good. How can God ever love me?" God says to you this morning as well, "Come to the table. I love you, and nothing is too much for my grace or for my forgiveness."

So the first part is about Jonah. Jonah needed to understand that he had to be humbly honest with himself and say, "Lord, I need you to forgive me." Getting into chapter three, it says for the second time, God, (in some ways) is saying, "Okay, Jonah, I'm glad you got that picture. Now let's try this again. Arise, go and tell." So Jonah goes to Nineveh.

As I said before, Nineveh is this humongous city. It is the capital of the nation which will eventually take over Israel. Jonah knows that that's a horrible place to be. He knows that it's known for its evil behavior and its violence. And I'm sure that part of Jonah is going there thinking, "Lord, seriously? This is like a suicide mission. I'm going to go there, I'm going to tell them, and they're going to kill me." And God just says, "Arise, go, and tell." Then there is something interesting in verse three. It says, **3** "Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it."

There have been lots of debates about, "What does it mean to go three days?" If you take the average walk - does that mean if you start on one side, it will take you three days to get to the other side?" We don't know that. At the end of chapter four, it says there's 120,000 people. Well, that's not that many people. What he is pointing at is that it's a big city. But you'll notice just before that it says, "Nineveh was a very large city."

I'll tell you, studying Hebrew has been great. It's been a challenge, but it's been great. In Hebrew where it says, "It was a very large city," there is the word "Elohim." Elohim is the name of God in Hebrew. It means God. There are many who have said that when it says it's a very large city, it is a great city. It is God's great city. It reminds us that every city belongs to God and God cares about everyone in every city.

God cares about your neighbor. God cares about the person on your street who never keeps the yard clean. God cares about the people who drive up and down your street at one o'clock in the morning, making all kinds of noise. God cares about everybody in Peterborough who is downtown. God cares about your city. God says to Jonah, "Arise, go and tell the people of Nineveh." So Jonah does.

Here's an interesting claim. If we go down to verse four, it says, "**4** Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." And that is his entire sermon. Some of you are thinking, "Hey, that would be kind of cool to have a five word sermon." Jonah just says five words. "40 days, Nineveh is going to be overthrown." And you'll look at that and you're going, "Why will Nineveh be overthrown? Who's going to overthrow it? And what do you have to do to make sure it's not overthrown?"

None of them are stated in Jonah's sermon. But notice what it says in verse five, "**5** The Ninevites believed God." The Ninevites believed God. They knew. They knew right away what it was. In fact, if you turn with me, in Romans chapter one, there is a piece there which says, "**17** For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, [so it's not what you do, which Jonah had to figure out as well in that first part,] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." **18** The wrath of God is being revealed from

heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, **19** since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. **21** For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

The Ninevites knew deep down, there is a God, and so do your neighbors know. Even the atheist knows that there is a God. They just don't want to admit it because then they have to be accountable to somebody other than themselves. Jonah is telling the people of Nineveh, "40 days and you're going to be destroyed." And the people knew right away, "It's God who's calling us."

As we read a little bit later from the king, he talks about their violence. And he says, "I know why God is calling us to repent because we've been violent and we need to quit. I know the only way possible to make this happen is for us to go to God and say we repent."

So the king first tears his robes, goes in the sackcloth, and he says in verse seven, "**7** This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. **8** But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. **9** Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

The Ninevites instinctively knew the who, the why, and the what. And they responded accordingly. And then, it says in verse 10, "**10** 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." It's the second time we hear that phrase come from God. The first is back in Exodus right after the golden calf was built. When God said to Moses, "Stand aside, buddy. I've got to get rid of these people and start again." Moses pleaded. And it says there, "And God relented and did not destroy the people of Israel."

Repentance leads to God's grace.

Now, through Jonah, we have the city of Nineveh, which was spared from being destroyed. We don't know how long that lasted. We don't know whether they really turned to God and started worshiping Him or whether they went back to their old ways. But we know at that moment, Jonah's invitation to repent preserved them.

In the video which we saw, we know when they talked about coming back to church, for some it took a long time. But when they came, they were saved. When they came to that point of understanding God's grace, they were saved. God says, "I invite you to be part of that ministry. I invite you to invite others into church so that they too may be saved."

Jonah preached the sermon of five. At the end of chapter two, Jonah makes a declaration of (in Hebrew) three words. "Yeshua is my salvation." You'll see in verse nine of chapter two, he says, **"9** What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

Jonah, while he was in the belly of the fish, made probably *the* statement of all of Scripture. "Salvation comes from God." That's what God is inviting to us this morning. He is inviting us to say, "I accept your invitation for myself and I am willing to share that invitation with others so that they also may know that salvation comes from God."

It is interesting at the end of chapter one, verse 16, if we go back to the response of the sailors, it says, **"16** At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him."

In Hebrew, when you repeat a word, it has great significance. Basically, what this says in the Hebrew (because it uses the same word for the first one) is, "The men greatly feared feared God."

The word used for fear in this case, is either fear - not necessarily afraid but when we talk about the fear of the Lord - or it can mean worship. So you could say, "And the men reverently worshiped God." but there's this dual aspect to it. And then it says, "They offer to sacrifice. "They sacrifice to sacrifice," is the way it's written. And the last one is, "They vowed a vow." It's not just once but it's twice for all of these.

And we are invited to do the same. We are invited to come before God and say, "We are going to worship, worship you. We are going to sacrifice our lives because of the sacrifice you have done for us. And we're going to vow to follow you in all the ways we can, as best we can, because salvation comes from you."

Let me end with this. The last verses from chapter four again, **"11** And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh..." because Jonah was furious. Furious at God for saving his enemy. In fact, one of the questions which I think we need to ask ourselves is, "Was Jonah more afraid of getting killed or was he more afraid of the fact that they might actually repent?"

Are we afraid of offending our neighbor? Or are we more afraid of the fact that they might actually become a Christian and become like us, and we can no longer be better than them? God says at the end, **"11** And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

If today that was being done, that last part, "and also many animals," God would have said that there are 120,000 in the city and also a lot of banks. God was concerned about not only them, but their livelihood. God is concerned, not only about you, but your livelihood. Not just about your neighbors, but your city's livelihood. God says this Christmas, "I invite you to honestly become humble and humble yourself before God and accept His invitation of grace. After you've accepted that invitation of grace, I invite you to give that invitation to others so that others may also accept God's invitation of grace."

This morning, we communed together at a table to which God has invited us. God is saying, "You've been invited to the table. Come eat and fellowship and invite your neighbors to the table because there's always room at the table of the Lord."

Let's pray. Dear Lord, we thank you that there is room at your table. We thank You, Lord, that You have provided a way for us to be able to come to your table. Lord, give us the courage to jump into those places where You say, "This is not good. This is running away from your face." Lord, help us to jump in knowing that your grace is waiting under the water for us to catch us. Lord, help us to extend that grace to those around us, that they too may see the grace which You have given to all people. Lord, we love you. We only do that, Lord, because You have first loved us, given Yourself, and called us to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus invites us to come to the cross and to bring all that we have to Him in that space. In Colossians chapter three, it says, "**12** Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **14** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. **15** Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful."

This week, as we go out and as we are challenged to take what we've received here and extend it to our neighbors, I invite you to arise in body or in spirit to hold out your hands and to receive the blessing of God which He gives you as grace.

As you have been fed grace at this table, go and feed grace to the hungry. As you have been set free by God's grace, go and share His grace to set free the imprisoned. As you have received grace from God, give grace to those around you. And as you have heard God's word of grace, proclaim it to your neighbor.

May the abundant love of God surround you. May the extravagant grace of Christ sustain you and may the constant presence of the Holy Spirit inspire and encourage you in every good deed and word. May the grace and peace of our Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry* 