

August 23 Worship Transcript

Welcome and Prayer – Reece Hiebert

Good morning. Welcome to worship at Tabor, whether you are joining the parking lot service, reading this transcript, or hearing this recording later, welcome to you all. Today we continue to study the book of Jonah, and Jonah as a follower. Jonah responded to a call, a call which was not the easiest task. As Jonah chapter 3 highlights, Jonah was called to travel through Nineveh and proclaim the message of the Lord, a task which took three days to complete. Jonah worked hard to convey the message of the Lord to Nineveh so God would be pleased. Jonah was a diligent follower as evidenced in chapter 3. Acting as a follower can be scary - putting faith in a message, and being able to quell the fear inside of ourselves so that the message is able to come through clearly. When God calls your name will you follow the call? God calls each of us, but the choice to follow is where each of us must make the choice. This is not a choice that God can make for us, but it is our individual decision to lean on our faith and trust in the Lord to guide our steps. May we be open this morning to the Lord's call and be willing to choose to follow in the path which has been laid for each of us.

Please pray with me as we gather our minds and hearts for worship.

Loving and guiding God, gather us in this message no matter where we are physically gathered this morning. May we remember that we are all gathered together in our love for you no matter where we are. We ask that you light our path, guide our steps, hold our hands, and be present in our hearts as we each strive to answer the individual call to follow you. Bring us together Lord, Amen.

Scripture Reading: Jonah 3 – Pastor Katherine Goerzen

¹Then 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.”

³Jonah 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. ⁴Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷This 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.

⁸But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

¹⁰When 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.

The Word of God for the People of God. **Thanks Be to God!**

Sermon – Pastor Phil Schmidt

“Turn Around”

Today, we continue our journey with Jonah. A brief recap: Jonah was a prophet who was supposed to run toward God and proclaim the word of God, but instead Jonah ran away from God, perhaps because he didn't want to “stink” like his enemies, the Ninevites. Even though Jonah tried to run away, God wasn't done with Jonah, so God sent a storm, which led to Jonah volunteering to be thrown overboard into the chaotic sea, which resulted in the sailors of the boat worshipping the living God. As Jonah sank, he cried out to God and God provided a huge fish to swallow him and that is where he remained for 3 days and 3 nights. He didn't want to “stink” like the Ninevites, but now he would stink like fish guts for quite a while. While in the fish, Jonah prayed to God, declaring his gratitude for God's salvation, and recommitting his life to following the ways of God. Then God had the fish vomit Jonah out onto dry land and we come to chapter 3, which begins almost exactly like chapter 1.

Here is Jonah 1:1-2 "The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.'"

And here is Jonah 3:1-2, "Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.'"

What happened next, Jonah's response to God's call, was very different in chapter 3 than it was in chapter 1. This time, Jonah turned from his previous behavior and instead of fleeing as a fugitive, faithfully followed God's call.

Since it is about time for school to begin, how about a little science lesson? Newton's first law of motion is basically that an object at rest will remain at rest and an object in motion will remain in motion unless acted upon by a force.

Jonah's first response to God's call was to run away and his life was in motion moving away from God, and yet God exerted force, a giant storm, a giant fish, to stop Jonah's motion. After the fish vomited Jonah out onto dry land, he was at rest and received the call from God a second time. And this time Jonah relied on his internal commitment that he had made while in the fish to exert force in his own life to move in the direction God was calling him. Jonah decided to be a faithful follower even though he still has a significant disagreement with the God's plan.

This story of Jonah turning from his previous course of action is an amazing example of transformed living even if Jonah hadn't yet experienced transformation in his thinking. Even in light of his disagreement with God, Jonah turned and followed God anyway. And this theme of turning around continues to be prominent throughout the rest of the chapter as well.

Jonah went to Nineveh, a prominent city in enemy territory. Jonah went to a people he thought of as evil through and through, a people deserving of punishment. He journeyed into the city for a whole day, proclaiming God's message, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Based on what we know about Jonah, we can imagine that he enjoyed preaching this warning of coming judgment on his enemies. He likely enjoyed preaching against the people of Nineveh because their wickedness had come before God. Jonah relished in the thought that God had a plan to bring destruction upon the city.

And yet, the response to Jonah's preaching was immediate and striking: "The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth" (3:5). The people of Nineveh understood Jonah's warning, believed God, turned from their ways and repented through fasting and wearing sackcloth.

But that's not all. The story escalates even further as the theme of turning continues in the following verses. Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, the big bad guy, the emperor, the evil overlord. We expect the king of a wicked city to act in a certain way, to live into the stereotypes of how bad he is, to reject the message of a half-hearted prophet from enemy Israel. We expect this evil king of the evil people to reject God, reject Jonah, and continue with life as normal.

But just like the people, the king acted immediately in a surprising way: "He rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust" (3:6) and he issued a proclamation for all people and animals in Nineveh to fast from food and drink, to put on sackcloth and call urgently on God, to give up their evil ways and their violence, hoping beyond hope that God might relent from punishing them.

Here again is an incredible story of turning around, repentance from the highest level of authority! Can you even imagine this kind of behavior? Throughout history and up to today, the story of people, especially people in positions in authority is that of grasping for more power, more wealth, more status, not turning away from evil behavior, not repenting and crying out to the living God!

And yet, reminiscent of the sailors in chapter 1, it is the foreign people of Nineveh, Jonah's enemies, who exhibited amazing faith. It is the King, the nobles, and all the people of the city who believed God, turned around, and practiced repentance. Even the animals joined in the fasting and wearing of sackcloth, highlighting the complete repentance of all living things in Nineveh. All together, this is a dramatic and almost unimaginable story of turning. As I think about it, I would guess that if you asked the original readers of Jonah what was more of a stretch to believe: a man living in a fish for 3 days or the whole city of Nineveh repenting and turning to God, I'm guessing they would say the city repenting is harder to believe. Incredible.

But that's not all that this chapter has to offer. The chapter ends with one more story of turning. In verse 10, we read, "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, God relented and did not bring on them the destruction God had threatened" (3:10).

The chapter began with Jonah turning and following God's call. In response to Jonah's preaching, the people who heard the warning turned and repented. Even more striking, when the warning reached the king, the king and all the people of Nineveh turned and repented, hoping for God's compassion. And in response to the people's radical act of turning, God turned from the plan to bring destruction upon the city. And thus we see that God called Jonah to preach a warning to the people of Nineveh in order to give them opportunity to turn from their evil ways. And when the people turned, God responded by also turning and extending compassion and grace. This story along with the following chapter teaches us who God truly is, a God of grace and compassion and love.

Next week we will reflect on Jonah's response to God relenting from bringing destruction upon Nineveh. But for today, let us experience this chapter of turning as a challenge to consider where we need to turn around in our own lives. Let us consider the movement of our own lives and what kind of force we need to turn us more in the direction of God.

Perhaps some of us have experienced the call of God in our lives and yet for whatever reason haven't responded to that call or have moved away from that call. If I am speaking to you, may you receive God's call, trust God's call, and turn your life in a way that you can faithfully follow God's call, even if it leads you into the unknown.

Perhaps some of us wrestle with how we perceive others who are different than us, whether they are a different age, have a different skin color, speak a different language, have a different culture, or have different political beliefs. If you wrestle with negative stereotypes and perceptions of other people, may God open your mind and heart to seeing all people as made in the divine image of God

and knowing that all people have opportunity to turn and embrace God's ways of grace, compassion, and love.

Perhaps some of us wrestle with our perception of God, thinking that God is angry, violent, and full of wrath, or perhaps thinking that God is distant and doesn't care. If you wrestle with your perception of God, may you come to know the true living God revealed here in the story of Jonah and revealed most clearly through the life and teachings of Jesus, a God of grace, compassion, and love to all people, a God who longs for justice and peace to prevail in our world through the actions of God's people.

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, may we turn our lives toward God and God's call as we seek to follow Jesus. And as we turn, may we pray for the whole world, for all people, to turn to God and God's ways of grace, compassion, and love. May we live with hope, knowing that God is always working through us and all of God's people to bring about God's reign here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Sending Prayer and Blessing – Pastor Phil Schmidt

Let us pray together:

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for your love and grace and compassion shown to us and to many people around the world through your Spirit and through your people. Thank you for your calling in each of our lives to turn away from what separates us from you and instead turn toward you. Grant us courage, oh God, to follow you faithfully now and in the future.

God, we give you thanks for new life and are especially grateful for the birth of Heath Ortiz Unruh, born to Michael and Lina. Bless this whole family as they welcome Heath as a son, grandson, cousin, and nephew.

God, we lift up our prayer requests to you. We pray for all school boards, administrators, staff, and teachers as they enter into and prepare for a unique school year. We pray your blessing upon all parents with many decisions that need to be made for the health and well-being of our families and communities. We pray for all children and youth and young adults attending preschool, elementary school, middle school, High School, college, and post-college. We pray that this school year ahead will be full of much learning and growth even amidst the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 virus.

God, we pray for all who are dealing with health concerns, both physical and mental illness. We pray for your Spirit of healing and comfort to be with all who are struggling. We also pray for your presence to be with all who are grieving loss in these challenging days, loss of loved ones, loss of connection with others, loss of income, loss of future plans.

God, we pray for all who constantly live with the reality of negative stereotypes placed on them due to the color of their skin, the language they speak, the place they were born, and many other reasons. Help us to truly see that you made all people in your good image. Help us to learn to think and act in ways that are anti-racist, and in ways that help make our communities and the whole world a better place. Help us to know that you long for all people to experience your compassion and love.

God of grace and love, teach us to turn our lives more and more toward you as we seek to follow Jesus each and every day. It is in the strong name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior, that we pray, Amen.

Receive now this Blessing: May our God of compassion, grace, and love, fill you with compassion, grace, and love as you seek to faithfully follow Jesus every day in big and small ways.