

# Hopkins South Monterey

## United Methodist Church

Affecting Lives Through Jesus Christ

Scripture & Sermon

January 24, 2021

Pastor Kelsey

Scripture: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

3 The Lord's word came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and declare against it the proclamation that I am commanding you." 3 And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's word. (Now Nineveh was indeed an enormous city, a three days' walk across.)

4 Jonah started into the city, walking one day, and he cried out, "Just forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!" 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on mourning clothes, from the greatest of them to the least significant.

10 God saw what they were doing—that they had ceased their evil behavior. So God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn't do it.

Sermon

*Gracious and Loving God,*

*Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.*

The reading assigned for today leaves us on a high note with Jonah's story. The people believed God's message through his testimony and began to repent. And "God saw what they were doing—that they had ceased their evil behavior. So God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn't do it." This is often where his story is brought to a close. I know it is how I always thought the story ended. Silly Jonah had a call by God and was frightened by it and so he ran away and ended up in the belly of the whale, but that put him straight and he went and did what God wanted him to do! But that is not the end of Jonah's story, there is a whole quarter left in fact, and it is the wildest part! You see, Jonah's story is a lesson in what not to do in more ways than the whole running away incident.

Directly following the last line of our reading for today, "So God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn't do it" is "But Jonah thought this was utterly wrong, and he became angry." WHAT?! God decided to have mercy on the people of Nineveh and Jonah, God's prophet, is angry? Jonah even goes on to pray to God and admit why he ran away to begin with. It wasn't because he was scared or he didn't want to do the work of preaching, but, as he said, "That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. 3 And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." He ran away because he KNEW God was gracious and God would have mercy on them if he succeeded at his call to preach the Good News to Nineveh and he did not want that for his enemies. He wanted God's fury and wrath to come upon them. God asked Jonah "Is it right for you to be angry?" Now, this is the funny part. He was mad at God and refused to keep doing his job, so he went out of the city, sat on top of a hill and pouted, hoping to watch the city be smited from there. So God placed a bush and had it grow up to give shade to Jonah, which pleased Jonah, but then God made the bush wither, and a hot breeze roll in and the sun to beat down so Jonah was miserable. Jonah wished again to die. God did the bush thing to prove a point. God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you be angry about the bush?" Jonah who quite liked the bush said, YES! And God dropped the mic and said, "You are concerned about this measly bush but not all the people of Nineveh and think I

should not care about those hundred twenty thousand people who are doing so badly because they are clueless?" And that is how the story ends. That's it.

Honestly, the image of Jonah pouting under a withered tree, miserable because he can't get over his own miserable hatred for the entire city of Nineveh, is a funnier image than him sitting in the belly of the whale. Though a satirical story full of exaggeration, it is a story with a powerful lesson for today. The story of Jonah warns us against wishing God's wrath on those we could consider our enemies. It warns us against caring more of petty things than of the redemption of humans who maybe aren't doing right yet but are willing to learn. It warns us against holding onto our own values and plans more tightly than God's values and plans. Though there is much to learn from Jonah about what not to do, ultimately, Jonah's story is a very human one. All too often we try to avoid God's calls to us because we can't get past our own opinions. All too often we can find ourselves pouting on a hill of our making because things didn't go our way. All too often we may find ourselves wishing the worst for our enemies instead of celebrating God's mercy for all. And yet. Jonah's story is a reminder to us that God still works. Despite Jonah's best darn efforts to muck it up and only bring doom to Nineveh, God's good news still made it to their ears and their hearts were transformed. And despite what a curmudgeon and grumble gus Jonah was, God still chose to use Jonah to be a part of God's work in the world. God's grace is not just for those who do not know God's ways or who are so far from the path, but also for those of us who think we are on God's path but stray once in a while and even for those who see God's path and actively turn aside and go our own way. This is a story of God's great and wonderful grace for all people, God's commitment to transformation of all, and God's work being done through even the slightest movement toward where God calls them to be. Let us be reminded of this grace as we listen for and work to follow God's call in our own lives. We are better to try to not follow in Jonah's footsteps and screw it up every step of the way, but we can also rely on God's great grace when we do mess up. God's Good News will find it's way.

Let us pray.

*Holy Fountain of Forgiveness, the tale of Jonah reminds us of your never-ending love for all creation. May we be like the people of Nineveh, who were able to acknowledge their sin and open their eyes to your healing presence. Though you stand ready to forgive our sin, we find it easier to bite our tongues, clench our fists, and cling to our hurts and resentments rather than let you open our hearts. We trust you, Holy One; we pour out our hearts to you. Receive the pain that lurks in our humanity, as we offer up what we have hidden from ourselves and from the world— those words and deeds that keep us separated from your love. When we repent, our God relents, lifting us beyond the pain, restoring us to safety, protecting us in the refuge of eternal love. In the name of Jesus, who is the Christ, you are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.*