

Lent 2020 – A Whale of a Fish Story
Our relationship to Others -Jonah 1:5-17

Introduction: Jonah encounters throughout the story the religiously and racially different. Note that Jonah never mentions an Israelite. This is between God and Jonah with the foreigners interacting with both. Jonah is rather dismissive to the others, whereas, they respond admirably. Like the centurion at the foot of the cross and the thief next to Jesus, they as foreigners recognize what God’s own people do not recognize and make confession. In addition, we will take many lessons from Jonah’s views and treatment of those outside his inner circle. As Jesus puts it, “Who is my neighbor?” Then goes on to tell the Good Samaritan story. How we interact with others also defines our identity. Who? Where? Why? The captain dives deeper into faith concluding that Jonah’s god must be punishing him. The simple question plunges at the core of our identity. Which one most identifies you? We are created in the “image” of God.

<p>⁵Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep.</p> <p>⁶The captain came and said to him, “What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.”</p> <p>⁷The sailors^{na} said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.</p> <p>⁸Then they said to him, “Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”</p> <p>⁹“I am a Hebrew,” he replied. “I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”</p>	<p>Jonah is self-absorbed in grief escaping reality. Conversely, the sailors understand not only the peril, but where it derives – from a god. The sailors are not closed or bigoted to other possibilities, other gods.</p> <p>“Get up” again the same word God uses to call Jonah on multiple occasions. The captain, a pagan is now calling him, pointing him to go towards God. The pagans recognize that sin has entered their situation.</p> <p>So they cast lots, a common method to lay claims. The sailors could have panicked and angrily thrown Jonah overboard, but they react kindly, trying to save Jonah from destruction. Their behavior is exemplary. Whereas Jonah does nothing for the common good of the travelers. They need Jonah’s action. They are all “in the same boat.” The sailors should be furious as Jonah stands complacent to watch them perish. Helping the neighbor is not simple self-serving, but God’s mandate that we co-humans.</p> <p>Jonah hides his faith under a bucket. He confesses first his nation, then his God. He neither prays nor proclaims. The captain has a right to rebuke. Jonah only responds with fatality, “Throw me over.” The sailors understand “Who you worship” reflects “Who</p>
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¹⁰Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them so.

¹¹Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous.

¹²He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.”

¹³Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them.

¹⁴Then they cried out to the LORD, “Please, O LORD, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.” ¹⁵So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging.

¹⁶Then the men feared the LORD even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

¹⁷ But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

you are.” “We all worship a god,” Said Luther.

God provides gifts across humanity, wisdom, goodness, and grace. We know many faithless people do good things. The sailors fall under that category and Jonah instead of despising should respect and care for them out of his love for God. Jonah is the opposite to the Good Samaritan.

“Throw me into the sea.” The million dollar question, why would Jonah say this? Has indifference toward the pagan at least reversed a bit seeing the terror in their eyes? He finally does something for another than himself – pity over contempt. Though we must be impressed that the sailors sought to save Jonah. Certainly, we see a parallel to the sacrificial love of Christ who will be hurled into hell for us. Matt. 12:41.

Jonah is thrown into the sea and immediately the raging sea calms. Luther puts it this way, “Jesus gets God off our backs.” The anger subsides because the sin is paid for.

We tend to set aside the angry God theology, yet would we accept a God who doesn't get angry over injustice, oppression, and wickedness? Anger is not inherently bad. We do not have a mere vindictive God who doles out punishment, Jonah doesn't get what he deserves. In Jesus, God takes our sin, our punishment upon himself. Now what do we think about the goodness of God. The reaction of the sailors is appropriate – they feared God even more. That is what true goodness can do.

The irony stuns the reader, the anti-missionary activity results in the conversion of pagans, “they made vows.”

God saves Jonah from certain death. For us Christians the reference to Jesus death and resurrection is obvious.