

Lent 2020 – A Whale of a Fish Story
Our relationship to Grace - Jonah 2:1-10

Introduction: Game Over. Time's run out. No more innings to play. God appointed the great fish (1:17) to save him and God will later appoint the plant to grow over Jonah saving him from the heat.

Often, addiction cannot be confronted until all is lost, hitting bottom. Jonah's fatal flaw can only be seen deep into the ocean, the buoyancy of his self-sufficiency drowned. The metaphor works on many levels – revealing things that are deep within us.

Biblical examples abound of those who “lose their life in order to save it.” Jacob, Joseph, Elijah, and Peter and Paul from the New Testament. When all of their schemes failed, broken and exhausted they gave in. “You never realize that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.” Jonah descends to the bottom only to discover the treasure of God's grace, salvation.

<p>2 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, ²saying,</p> <p>“I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. ³You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ⁴Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how^W shall I look again upon your holy temple?’ ⁵The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head ⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O LORD my God.</p>	<p>Jonah is alive in the fish, but how long? He still resides in a watery prison and does not yet see the result of what God is up to.</p> <p>His prayer reflects the psalmist writing a personal lament psalm (Psalms are categorized as Personal/Community and Praise/Lament) All, except one psalm, ends in a praise as does Jonah here.</p> <p>Psalm 130 begins “Out of the depths I cry to you...” and ends “He will redeem Israel from her sins.” Jonah begins with a perspective of his sin (running away is clear disobedience from God.) We too must admit sin in order to see God's salvation. If we can achieve salvation on our own, we can continue to Tarshish, “We can fix this.” The religious Pharisees too believe with enough ritual and legal wrangling we could fix our relationship with God. How do we today “Fix it?”</p> <p>Jonah is on a descending path – down to Joppa, down to a ship, into the depths of the ship, finally down into a belly into the depth of the sea.</p> <p>Jonah describes the distance he feels from God, imprisoned, only death is impending. His sin has isolated him from God (not the</p>
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<p>⁷ As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.</p> <p>⁸ Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.</p> <p>⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!”</p> <p>¹⁰ Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.</p>	<p>other way around.) He is barred and only one has the key to unlock the door.</p> <p>Twice your “Holy Temple” is mentioned. Lev. 16:14-15 the Day of Atonement – the priest sprinkles blood for the sins of the people on the mercy seat (a slab of gold on top of the Ark of the Covenant holding the Ten Commandments.) Ex. 25:22 God promises to speak to us from the mercy seat. Jonah confesses an image of the impossible law and a merciful God.</p> <p>“Idols” certainly referred to as pagan statues, but as Luther insightfully said, “We all have a false god in our hearts.” And it is usually us!</p> <p>Typical of the lament psalm, Jonah turns from despair to a merciful God who is the giver of life, who can lift us from despair. Is it any wonder that Jesus referred to Jonah as a parallel. We are incapable of saving ourselves (even Jesus is raised by his Father in heaven.)</p> <p>Jonah praises before he is released, contrasting the sailors who praised after the sea was calmed. Perhaps the real deliverance is from the spiritual prison, not the fish belching him back to civilization.</p> <p>The Hebrew word is more accurately translated “Salvation” the name Joshua and Jesus. NRSV decided to translate as “Deliverance.”</p>
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Final Thoughts: Nearly every month, someone shows up on the newscast telling us the dangers of texting and driving, or other ills of our society. Yet, it seems we do not listen. We only stop when something dramatic happens *to us*. Jonah will eventually show up in Nineveh, but still holds onto his attitude of superiority. He sits in the belly confessing his sin and need for mercy, he stills holds an attitude of “I deserve it.” I have sinned, but they are wicked beyond just sin.