

Lent 2020 – A Whale of a Fish Story  
Our relationship to God’s Word - Jonah 4:1-11

Introduction: God’s mercy collapses in on Jonah creating a fit of fury and then depression. Psalms end in praise, the story of Jesus in resurrection, and finally in the end salvation. So why does Jonah bankrupt the good news of its desired joy, when we might rather think it would go to his head and think of himself as the greatest preach ever?!

<p><b>4</b> But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? 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.</p> <p><sup>3</sup>And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”</p> <p><sup>4</sup>And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”</p> <p><sup>5</sup>Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.</p> <p><sup>6</sup>The LORD God appointed a bush,<sup>u</sup> and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so</p>	<p>Jonah lashes out at God. They turned because they feared. They didn’t convert. How can you let their evils deeds “off the hook” so quickly? If they are not punished, will they simply slip back into their wickedness and again oppress us? Where is the eye for an eye? We are the chosen, the loved, the favored child. (Older son in the parable of the prodigal son.)</p> <p>Jonah flings Ex. 34:6-7 back into God’s face. Jonah selectively justifies himself setting scripture against scripture (Devil in the wilderness.) Jonah declares himself right in his indignation – “Aha!” Jonah needed mercy in the belly of the fish, but not the same kind as those who worship idols (2:8). “We” deserve mercy, “they” do not.</p> <p>Jonah is willing to forsake his relationship with God for his own nationalistic interests. Certainly we understand his love for country and the terrorist state neighboring to the north, but his trust lies in the greatness of his nation not in God who seemingly doesn’t care about the threat.</p> <p>Anger can motivate for action. This kind of anger is debilitating and viral eating away at the soul.</p> <p>Instead of staying in Nineveh to teach and continue preaching, he slinked away dragging his bottom lip. He watches and continues to hope for disaster upon Nineveh.</p> <p>See Matthew 18:21ff. The forgiven refuses to forgive. First God hurled the great storm, now</p>
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Jonah was very happy about the bush. <sup>7</sup> But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” <sup>10</sup> Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

a little gentler with Jonah he consoles and offers an object lesson. We Christians face the same challenge as Jonah. We are forgiven, we are to forgive...even the worst of them.

Maybe a castor oil plant which grows quickly with broad leaves. “Very happy” seems overly reactionary considering what is going on. Ancients never consider a god who has compassion, who cares, “a heart attachment.” Apathy typically applies to the divine. It is one thing to grieve over ones we love, God leaps much farther grieving those who he doesn’t “love,” those not attached to him. Gen. 6:6. We attach based upon needs. God needs nothing.

Compassion = concern in our reading.

Left from right – figure of speech for spiritually blind. God still doesn’t write them off.

Passion week lifts Jesus over and over exuding compassion – over Jerusalem, thief on the cross, his crucifiers, etc. Jonah went outside the city to witness condemnation, Jesus went out of the city to receive it and save us.

Final Thoughts: To simply say God doesn’t punish evil because God has mercy is a hollow response for those who suffer. Jonah casually chose to leave out the end of the Exodus text with Moses where the punishment is mentioned. God does judge. God’s goodness brings together mercy and judgment. To let people perish (no judgment) cannot resolve with a good God. Without mercy, to judge with impunity every sin resulting in damnation leaves no hope. Of course, from our New Testament lens we see the answer. Luther coins it, “We are simultaneously saint and sinner.”

God never gives up on Jonah and his own repentance. We end on the cliff. Much like Mark’s gospel we beg, “What now?”