

Jonah 3:10-4:11

Matthew 20:1-16

Philippians 1:21-30

“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love!”

AMEN!

(Sing!)

Ba-da-da-da-da-da-da-da.... brink-brink-brink

Ba-da-da-da-da-da-da-da.... ba-tink

Ba-da-da-da-da-da-da-da....

“Oh, hola!

Darling you got to let me know
Should I stay or should I go?
If you say that you are mine
I'll be here til the end of time
So you got to let me know
Should I stay or should I go?”

(Ha! Ha!) It is absurd for me to begin a sermon
with the popular song
“Should I Stay or Should I Go,”
by the English punk rock band the Clash.

I almost chickened out because it's so absurd!
What if the bishop was here?

What kind of person would participate
in a church with an absurd pastor? :-)

On the week of our 67th anniversary
as a congregation!

This beloved is your church and we
praise God in surprising ways;
even absurd ways. (Pause)

Absurd is defined as “wildly unreasonable; illogical.”

This is the key thread for the lessons today.

What other word describes the story of Jonah?

A prophet of God whose very name suggests
that this story is meant to have humor.

Translators say the word “Jonah” can
mean dove or pigeon.

“In Hosea 7:11, this bird embodies a put-down...
meaning one who is “silly” or “without sense.”

In other words, this “Pigeon” prophet behaved
more like a flighty bird than a mouthpiece
for the Lord.

And behold, still God stayed with him.

Maybe, the most absurd, of all!

Did God wonder if she should stay or go?

The unwilling prophet knows what to do!

He took off and flew away to a place as far as
he could imagine to get away from God.

But a storm on the seas led him to confess
to his fellow sailors that the ship and crew
were in peril because he...
the reluctant prophet disobeyed God.

The sailors realized he couldn't stay with them,
he had to go, and in panic,
threw the poor pigeon overboard.

The storm and waters calmed immediately and
still God remained with him by sending
a giant fish to swallow him up!

Talk about out of the frying pan and into a fire,
but don't worry!

He's not dead but inside the fish for

three days and three nights. (Hmmm)

That sounds familiar!

But, even in giant fish bellies,
God finds Jonah, and stayed with
the flighty man who decided
to chant a psalm of thanksgiving.

What else is there to do in a fish?

The song is so beautiful,
go home and read it this week!

It is in chapter 2 and it makes such
an impression on the Lord that the Lord
spoke to the fish and the fish swam
to the nearest shoreline and
vomited Jonah out upon dry land.

The Bible translates is a bit gentler than that,
but that's what the fish did.

Upchucked that pigeon,
for he cannot stay in the fish.

Jonah reluctantly took to flight, again.

This time in the right direction to proclaim

the Lord's message to the people of Ninevah.
(Pause)

It's meant to be funny and we
are allowed to laugh at the absurdity.

We might even wag our fingers saying
"You should have listened to God
from the start, you silly Bird!"

But what is not funny is that
the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Ninevah,
was the land of the enemy.

As learned scholars, Julia O'Brien and
Thomas Bolinger, shared:

we quickly realized why Jonah had good
reason to disobey God's command
to preach to them.

You see, "the Assyrians were well-known
for skinning their prisoners alive,
marching them away tethered by nose rings,
and impaling them on spikes.

In 722 BCE the Assyrians destroyed Israel and
made their way to pillage and destroy Jerusalem.

They were hated enemies.(Pause)

Who is our worst enemy?

Russia? China? North Korea?

What would your answer to God be if

God called you to go to those places and
cry out in their streets?

“Forty days more, and China, North Korea, Russia
forty days more an you will be overthrown!”

We’d probably say “No thanks!”

With an expletive (or two) added. :-)

Still, for Jonah, in miraculous form eventually did,
and the people from high position
to low repented and changed for
the better in God’s eyes.

Not only was there that miracle but another to follow...

God changed God’s mind and did not
destroy the city, all her people,
nor all her animals.

The reluctant prophet succeeded,
but was not happy.

He was quite angry, in fact.

He'd known God to be gracious and merciful.

Such characteristics made Jonah so angry
that he wanted to die because no one wants
God to be merciful upon the people we hate.

And that's it!

That's our message...

Jonah, the reluctant prophet and most people of
the United States are much more comfortable
with abuse.

We've grown accustomed to it;
abuse is normalized, but when
something generous happens to those we call
enemies, hold the phone!

We go nuts! We become angry. (Pause)

Think I am being absurd?
Maybe, maybe not.

Ask yourself, what's your biggest
complaint about Jesus' parable.

It's a challenging one, for sure!

A crowd gathered early in the morning,
hoping to be hired for the day.

When we lived in Atlanta, I saw it everyday.

People standing outside gas stations
hoping to be picked up to work.

Some would be lucky enough to be picked up
to work for the day, most were not.

Is it absurd to think people can survive that way or
is it absurd to think people would pick them up?

When we look at the parable in two sections
we find how the landowner needed laborers to
work in the vineyard

and he made five trips to pick up workers.

"The kingdom of heaven is like this," Jesus said.

It's like people standing around looking for work.

Look around, these are your fellow laborers and
there's much work to be done.

“Should you stay or should you go?”

Part two of the parable is the part where
the workers get paid.

The day’s over and the work done.

We find that the landowner wanted
to pay the workers who worked
the least amount of time, first.

Ok, the first is last and the last gets paid first.

It’s the owner’s decision, we understand, but wait!

He paid them the same amount that
he promised the all day workers!

Absurd!

But, lucky them (they think)
this is a generous landowner so if
the short-timers are getting that much,
just think how much the all-day
laborers will get!

Yet, when it comes time for them to step forward,
they are paid the contractual amount.

The same amount as the short-timers and
they worked all day in the sun.

You're not alone if this is the absurd part for you.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner
that gives equal pay for unequal work.

We call it unfair!

I'd feel cheated, too!
I'd be a little angry! Wouldn't you?

Yet, this is the way of God.

God's mercy and love is far greater
than our anger or our reluctance can ever be.

God is willing to wait for us, stay with us,
and guide us while we figure
this kind of God-love out.

And while we struggle with staying or going,
we recall God's promise to always
stay in our midst.

To hold humanity in the palm of his hand
and shelter us under her wing.

AMEN!