

Jonah 3:10-4:11

Matthew 20:1-16

Philippians 1:21-30

“The might of your awesome deeds
shall be proclaimed, O God;
we will declare your greatness.” AMEN!

Nineveh was evil.

Jonah knew it, God knew it.

There was violence, injustice, and defiance
toward a higher power.

The account of the Prophet Jonah is one
that can challenge our nation’s behavior
and misguided forms of justice.

Challenging because isn’t it true
that life in America (and other parts of the world),

also involves the existence of violence,
injustice, exploitation, an indifference to suffering,

and a whole lot of confidence in government entities
relied on to protect us
by whatever means are necessary?

There’s also the defiance of God’s justice.

The US is not Nineveh simply, and

the Jonah story should not lead us
to condemn a whole nation of people,

but there's no denying our proclivity to gun violence,
domestic abuse, harsher force and penalty upon
non-white people, and civil policies
that treat some communities
as disposable.

The systems of economy in the US have
left its workers poor, hungry, and unsheltered;
often whole families.

Over and over we hear of the elite wealthy,
people and corporations, negatively

influencing entities that used to provide assistance
to those struggling to find work, maintain it,
and make enough to feed and
care for themselves,
if misfortune occurred.

The basket our society used to have
to assist people in hard times
has had the bottom cut out of it.

The same extreme wealthy bring about
environmental danger and protected land capture.

The inequality and neglect is immense, and
the institutional response to those who
rebel against such injustice is more arrests,
expanded prison construction, and
more executions with the harsher
punishments and penalties on
the Black and Latino siblings.

Our nation's poor behavior spills over the borders
as we come to know that the United States
is among the world's largest greenhouse
gas emitters, with no sign of repentance.

No sign of good environmental stewardship.

If we continue down this path
there's sure to be more drought,
more flooding, more bad air,
more displacement and
more food insecurity.

Bombs get dropped indiscriminately,
commitments to allies are broken, our soldiers
are forced to live on crumbling ships
and forced to serve oppressive
lengths without rest and family.

Money promised to voters if certain parties win.
(Pause)

Jonah sat outside Nineveh with
a ledger in his heart, much like the one
we have in ours.

Nineveh was cruel and the US is cruel.

Jonah knew the reputation of Nineveh and
we know the reputation of Washington, DC.

And the terrible things they do.

Like Nineveh, we make nations tremble. (Pause)

God said “Go to Nineveh,” and Jonah
ran the other way.

The reluctant prophet fled.

We too are as reluctant as Jonah.

There’s a good chance that we carry the same ledger
in our heart that Jonah had.

We want the bad to be punished.

We want the evildoers to pay for their transgressions.

We want the one that worked the whole day
to get more pay than the one who got hired late.

Fair is fair, after all. (Pause)

And it's worthwhile, I think, to ask ourselves
how we define "fairness."

Is it through the eyes of productivity, or ability, or
is it a frame of mind?

Most of us would agree that the ones
who worked the longest, through the heat of
the day, ought to be the ones

who get paid more than those who came to work late.

It's not fair, in our economy, that
the ones idle get paid the same amount.

We grumble like those who were
hired early in the parable.

And this is precisely what makes
this parable one of Jesus' best.

It is great because it makes us angry.

Picture in your mind the person or the corporation
that you dislike the most (don't say any names!).

Now picture them being forgiven when they repent.

Notice the way you've been "good" for so long
and they get the same reward.

Human fairness says:

"You made the debt;
you pay for it."

God's economy of fairness says,
"The debt is real, the wrong is serious,
and justice matters -

but I will bear the cost myself to bring you home."
(Pause)

Something unexpected occurred
to me this week during study.

Jonah didn't flee from God's call to go to Nineveh
with the message to repent because
he thought they were innocent.

He fled because he suspected that God
would *forgive them* if they repented.

In chapter 4:2, Jonah says,

“I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
and ready to relent from punishing.”

And when it happened just like he thought,
he was angry.

Many in our nation are angry at the welfare basket
we have in our economy to help those
who need it.

The main argument is that people take advantage of it.

Many people who have been faithful God believers
also think that people will take
advantage of God's grace and forgiveness.

They, and we sometimes, feel like
the late comers make God into a pushover
and thus look weak.

So slowly we begin to see... in our maturity... that
the Gospel of God is not fair.

At least not according on the world's scale.

According to the world,
the power of violence prevails, and
the power of grace goes unseen against it.

The truth, though, is that “unseen” doesn’t
mean “not there.” (Pause)

There’s a story about a church in Minneapolis
that opened its doors to be a sanctuary
for people in fear of ICE.

It was later discovered that within the church
there was an informant reporting on
their ministries.

When the church discovered who it was
they grieved the violation and rightly discerned
their call to protect the stranger,
the vulnerable, and the immigrant.

But the gospel spoke to them in other ways, too.

The gospel did not permit them to stop at hatred.

Jesus spoke to them to pray for enemies,
not because betrayal is harmless, but because
no person is beyond the reach of
God’s mercy.

So, after the discovery they prayed for
the families who were frightened.

They prayed for wisdom and courage;
protection and justice.

And then with choked tears,
they prayed for the undercover agent.

“Lord, reveal the fear that ICE causes.

Turn this agents heart from suspicion to compassion.

Save him from being an instrument of harm.

Bring him truth, and teach us to resist evil
without being evil.”

Praying for enemies; knowing
they’re not beyond God’s mercy.

This is not weakness; it is gospel strength.

AMEN!