

What Is God's Word for the City?

Sermon Notes for Jan 28, 2018 at Brentwood

Psalm 62:5-12 (515) & Jonah 3:1-10 (845)



The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it what I tell you." (Jonah 3:1)

Provocative Ponderings that Call Forth Our Potential in Christ

We'll review the whole story of Jonah to get a sense of its flow and remind ourselves (or discover for ourselves) some surprising insights into the way God acts in the world – then we'll take a closer look at the key message that arises from the story about how to serve God in the city – then imagine what that call might mean for our lives in the city

- What most of us know about Jonah has to do with the belly of a whale – gross to imagine and not really clear about the point – so, let's review the story very briefly – God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh and prophesy against their wickedness – basically, the message is you're messing up God's order of justice, kindness, and humility – turn things around and align with God – but Jonah refused and flees – God pursues him, takes him to Nineveh in the belly of a fish – I find in the Psalm of Thanksgiving in Chapter 2 a powerful picture of depression – just one of the ways the story speaks to us – but God forgives and redeems Jonah and sets him back on his mission – Nineveh repents – turns from their ignorant and evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands – but Jonah is furious – can't fully grasp the mercy of such a loving God – shades of the older son in the parable of the prodigal
- The proclamation of the story as a whole, then, is the breadth of the grace and mercy of God, encompassing the Gentiles as well as the Jews – the story probably originated during the imperial rule of Assyria – Jews were a captive and oppressed people yet again – rather than fuel their anger with revenge, God lifts their depression with acts of steadfast love and forgiveness – no matter how ignorant and evil the city was, God did not give up on it – he treated it with his justice and kindness – infinitely broader and more steadfast than ours – so, let God be God and rejoice in the riches of God's grace
- God's word to Nineveh was forgiveness and repentance – they happen simultaneously, in a dynamic that we don't fully understand – in gratitude for everything that flows from the steadfast love of God, everything changes – attitudes and behaviours align into a different way of doing things, a different way

*Notes for a sermon preached by Brian Fraser,
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of being in and for the world – in a midst of the complexities and confusions of urban life, where the impacts of our continuing rebellions against God's constraints are so evident, the simplicity of God's forgiving love is proclaimed by God, through us, for the city – remember Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in yet another time of depressing disruption in Jewish history – seek the welfare of the city to which I have sent you, and pray on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your own – and the word we proclaim to make that happen in forgiving love

So, what are we going to do with this ...

Three insights stick with me from this 'parable' – first, God loves the city – no matter how ignorant, depressed, evil, and violent things have become, God's soul cries for the city's redemption and sends people like you and I to contribute to that redemption – quite simply, to proclaim God's love as the determining factor in our lives - second, that redemption may not look like what we want or expect – there may be a breadth and depth to God's love that we have not yet grasped – so, let's stay open to learning new ways to proclaim God's justice and kindness with humility – third, pay attention to God's persistence in drawing *you* into this mission of praying for and blessing the city – the 'belly of the fish' takes many forms, fear and depression among them – but there is new purpose and new life beyond – and it will involve walking humbly with God in caring for God's creation

Your Notes ...

Today's Framework for our Prayers

Thanks – for the steadfast love that nourishes our contributions to your Commonwealth, even in and through times of confusion, depression, and anger ... [a time of silent prayer]

Help – in seeing the city around us through your eyes, eyes of compassion and caring, seeking ways to invite people to live together differently, in the simplicity of your love ... [a time of silent prayer]

Awe – that you have not given up on us, that your forgiveness and repentance flow like an eternal fountain into the parched deserts of our cities ... [a time of silent prayer]

Note – *the image for the sermon this morning is from Laura Zerebeski, whose wonderful image of our sanctuary has given us such pleasure – you can find more of her striking images of Vancouver at www.laurazee.com.*