

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Jonah"

Scripture: Jonah 3:10-4:11

Hymns: All creatures of our God and King 433, Come sing, O church, in joy! 757

Children's: Jesus bids us shine 773

Choruses: (10,000 Reasons) Bless the Lord, I will call upon the Lord, Change my heart, O God

April 15, 2018

Rev. Steve Filyk

A sentencing hearing is expected next week.

After waiting for 17 months

the family of Jennifer Gatey will learn

what will happen to the man who drove into their daughter,

killing her instantly,

and then tried to cover up what he did.

You have probably heard about this case.

How the 16-year-old was killed at a bus-stop

the day before her birthday.

How the driver fled.

And how he tried to hide the damage to his vehicle,

The evidence of his hit-and-run.

You may also have heard that the driver, Jason Gourlay,

"pleaded guilty [pleaded guilty] to two charges:

Failing to remain at the scene of an accident

And obstruction of justice."ⁱ

As for the sentence, "the Crown is suggesting about five to nine months...

[which includes time served]...

while the defence says he should spend no more time in jail."ⁱⁱ

PAUSE

So if the Crown gets what it wants,
Five to nine months in prison,
will you be satisfied with the verdict?

Will you think justice is served?
Or would you ask for a harsher sentence?

PAUSE

Today we heard the story of Jonah.
The children's story gave us a quick overview.
Then Mike read us the final chapter of his story.

Most people don't think much of Jonah.

He's a draft dodger, avoiding God's call.
He's a whiner and complainer.

But worst of all he has no compassion for the people of Nineveh.

So what's up with this Jonah?
What does he have against God's grace and mercy?ⁱⁱⁱ

Most people don't think much of Jonah.
But maybe like 'doubting' Thomas of last week's lesson,
He's been given a bad rap.

To understand Jonah's hatred of Nineveh
We need to understand what that city meant to him
And to the people who first heard his story.

As the capital of the empire which captured Israel's northern kingdom
 And deported its people, Nineveh was
 "a symbol of all that opposed the Lord and the Lord's people.

Those whom the Book of Jonah addresses
 had memories of their own ancestors
 suffering under the cruelty of Nineveh and the Assyrians...

Nineveh was, as Nahum named her, "the harlot,"
 the "bloody city,"
 the center of violence and terrorism, the enemy."^{iv}

At the beginning of the book of Jonah
 We are told that the reason Jonah is sent to Nineveh
 Is that it's wickedness is stinking to high heaven.^v

Everyone seems to agree,
 Even God agrees,
 that the Ninevites are a bad people,
 that Nineveh is a bad place.

This goes a long way in helping us understand
 Why Jonah doesn't want to warn the Ninevites.

I'll confess that I don't like one my neighbors.
 He has the habit of filling our cul-de-sac with
 vehicles that he's fixing.

He's running a garage, a repair shop in his front yard.

If the bylaw officers noticed his activities
And sent for some tow trucks
Do you think I'd run down the hill and warn him?

No. I think I'd grab a beer.
Pull out my lawn chair.
Relax and enjoy the show!

If you can understand me,
Then you can certainly understand Jonah.

God asks Jonah to warn a nation
That has a history of oppressing Jonah's people.
Jonah doesn't want them to be warned and be saved.

And so Jonah attempts to dodge his mission.
But it's hard to escape "the God of heaven
who made sea and land."^{vi}

After ending up in the belly of a whale,
Jonah decides to do what he's asked to do.

He doesn't preach an eloquent sermon.
He doesn't 'delight' as Augustine instructs preachers.^{vii}

Jonah proclaims simply:
"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."^{viii}
Forty days and this city will be destroyed.
Sounds like the ravings of a religious nut!

But the people of Nineveh listen to Jonah;
they both 'instructed' and 'moved' by this word from the Lord.

They "announced a fast, humbled themselves,
[and] clean up the terrorism and violence in their city.
[And this by the way] was not the action of just a few,
but involved everyone, including the animals!"^{ix}

How does God respond to their repentance?

We are told that
"When God saw what they did
and how they turned from their evil ways,
[God] relented

and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened."^x

Now for most preachers to witness such a response...
Would be the most marvelous thing that could happen.

Instead of having people shake their hands and say
"I found that interesting Pastor",
These people literally turned their lives around.

And then God Almighty responds to the repentance
With compassion and grace!
This is all too amazing and wonderful.

But for Jonah this is not a success.
For Jonah this is a disaster.

God's clemency, God's forgiveness is exactly what he was afraid of.
 He didn't want Nineveh to be shown mercy.
 He wanted God's wrath!

And so when Jonah witnesses the reprieve.
 He gets angry and he tells God all about it.

"Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home?
 That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish.

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God,
 slow to anger and abounding in love,
 a God who relents from sending calamity.

*REPEAT: I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God,
 slow to anger and abounding in love,
 a God who relents from sending calamity.*

Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."^{xi}

Jonah can't endure God's compassion on Nineveh.
 Jonah would rather die
 Than see God go easy on Nineveh.

When God hears this complaint, this protest
 God asks Jonah:
 "Is it right for you to be angry?"

But Jonah had already said his peace,
And made his way to the east of the city.
There he constructs a shelter,
And waits to see
if God will be persuaded after listening to him.

Jonah is still hoping for the fiery judgment
God had promised in the first place.

But God doesn't rain down fire on Nineveh.
And God doesn't strike down his sulking servant.

Instead God determines to teach Jonah a lesson;
To help Jonah see gracious heart.

God provides a leafy plant to provide cool shade for Jonah.
This makes Jonah happy.

The next day God provides a worm
That attacks that plant and makes it wither.
God follows this up with a scorching east wind
That blazes down on poor Jonah's head.

Happy Jonah is soon suffering heat-stroke and complaining:
"It would be better for me to die than to live."

And so God questions him again:
"Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"
Jonah laments bitterly:
"It is... I'm so angry I wish I were dead."^{xii}

God listens to Jonah whining
 And then God challenges him:

“You have been concerned about this plant,
 though you did not tend it or make it grow.
 It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh,
 in which there are more
 than a hundred and twenty thousand people
 who cannot tell their right hand from their left—
 and also many animals?”^{xiii}

All to say, “Listen Jonah,
 If you can be so concerned about a plant
 That you never tended,
 That was part of your life for less than 24 hours

Can't I be concerned with thousands of morally disoriented people
 people and their animals,
 life that I have brought into being,
 In a city I have tended to for thousands of years?

PAUSE

We hear frequent stories about people who perpetrate violence.
 People who run down the young
 Or steal from the elderly.

This wickedness should make us angry.

And if we are angry about the senseless death
Of a teenager who was simply waiting for a bus,
Then how much more should her own family
Who will miss her each day for the rest of her lives.

But what about Jason Gourlay, and what about his family?
Is there any compassion for them in this tragedy?

Is there any compassion for those who do things that are reckless
Or act in ways that are callous?

People who make such selfish or immoral or unethical decisions,
That we wonder if they know their right hand from their left.

Truth is we seldom think about these people.

We are more occupied with the material things around us.
We are busy washing our cars,
or redecorating our homes...

But if we can be so committed to such things
That are here today and gone tomorrow,
Then shouldn't God be concerned about real people,
Broken people, who do what is wrong.

All to say that while God grieves for Jennifer's family
God has compassion for Jason Gourlay and his family too.

PAUSE

Today's story doesn't tell us whether God persuaded Jonah,
And softened his heart towards Nineveh.

The story doesn't tell us whether Jonah grew in compassion
Or simply remained bitter for the rest of his life.

The bigger question of course

Is what our attitude will be towards

People we think, don't deserve any mercy?

Will we be loving our enemies?

Or will we be praying that they get what they deserve?

Because when it comes to God's compassion,

It would seem that deserve has nothing to do with it...

ⁱ Chris Foulds "FOULDS: Sentence Gourlay to long-term talks with students" *Kamloops this Week* April 12, 2018
www.kamloopsthisweek.com/opinion/foulds-sentence-gourlay-to-long-term-talks-with-students-1.23265470

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ See Anthea Portier-Young "Commentary on Jonah 3:10-4:11" www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=158

^{iv} Limburg, James. Hosea-Micah: Interpretation (p. 140). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

^v Jonah 1:1-2

^{vi} Jonah 1:9 NIV

^{vii} Augustine informs us that the three aims of a preacher are to "instruct, delight, and move." See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 4.74-86.

^{viii} Jonah 3:4 NIV

^{ix} Limburg, James. Hosea-Micah: Interpretation (pp. 151-152). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

^x Jonah 3:10 NIV

^{xi} Jonah 4:2-3 NIV

^{xii} Dialogue and story from Jonah 4:4ff

^{xiii} Jonah 4:10-11 NIV