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**Out of Our Comfort Zone**  
**Jonah 4**  
**November 17, 2013, Jeff Germo**

We are at the last chapter in our series on Jonah - The Reluctant Evangelist. I'm not sure how you felt about the series, but for me, studying and preparing has been very satisfying. As we noted in the first sermon, God is the protagonist, or the hero of this narrative. The story is about Him and we can get to know His character, and grow in our relationship with him as we walk with Him in it. We have seen his **sovereignty** very clearly. We have seen his **power**. We've seen his **patience**. We have seen how he unrelentingly **pursues relationship** with the people he created. We've seen his **providence**. We've seen his **grace**. And we have also noted his **justice**. And today, we are going to experience his love and his compassion for all people.

Once again let's summarize where we have come from so that we are reminded how chapter four fits in with the greater narrative of Jonah.

Jonah was a prophet on the run from God. God had given him a message to take to the Ninevites. Jonah refused the call and ran as fast and as far as he could in the opposite direction. He caught a ship and headed out on the Mediterranean Sea to try to get as far from God as possible.

And in his attempt to run from God he experienced God's grace at each step along the way. God stirred up a great storm so that the sailors who commanded the ship he had boarded feared for their lives. When they found out that the storm was caused by Yahweh to get Jonah's attention they asked Jonah what they should do and he told them that if they wanted to be saved they would have to throw him overboard, which they eventually reluctantly did. God calmed the storm. And Jonah was saved from the depths of the sea by a big fish that God sent to swallow him. He experienced the grace of God at the most terrifying time of his life, at his lowest point. God kept him alive in the fish for three days and three nights, and in his quiet time, while he camped out alone with his thoughts, he realized how good God was, how foolish he was for attempting to run from God, and how he almost forfeited God's grace by hardening his heart towards him.

When he had come to his senses, God, again, in His grace, saved him. He ordered the fish to vomit Jonah up on dry land and reissued his mission to go the Ninevites with a message. So, Jonah makes the trek, over 1000km on foot to Nineveh. He arrived, likely looking like the living dead, and delivered his message, **"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."**

The whole city responded positively, repented of their sins, turned to God, and God, in his grace decided not to destroy them.

Imagine if we put on a revival service at Spirit Park downtown and everyone in Campbell River, Courtney, and Comox showed up and responded positively to a call to follow Jesus. What would that be like for us? I would be so pumped you wouldn't be able to keep my feet on the ground. I still get excited now even if I have one person that comes up to me after a sermon and tells me that God spoke to them. It's so humbling for me to know that God could use me in even small ways. Can you imagine what it would be like if the whole city of Campbell River responded to the Gospel of Jesus because we were obedient to his call? That would be so amazing. Let's see how Jonah responded to the news that the whole city of Nineveh responded to his preaching.

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**Jonah 4 (NLT)**

**<sup>1</sup>This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. <sup>2</sup>So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. <sup>3</sup>Just kill me now, LORD! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen."**

Jonah was ticked off. He was not happy at all. He threw a temper tantrum and in his uncontrolled anger suggested that his life is not worth living, so God might as well just kill him. **"Just kill me now, LORD!"**

How is he going to face his countrymen when he goes back home? They're going to ask excitedly, "How did it go? You went to our enemies the Assyrians in Nineveh to pronounce God's judgment against them. Did God destroy them?" And he would have to tell them, "No, actually, um, because of my preaching they're all alive and well. They all turned to Yahweh. God saved them." This would not sit well. Israel was not accustomed to wishing their enemies well. He was going to be humiliated and seen as a huge failure. So, he tells God, **"You might as well just kill me now."**

He is angry at God because God was true to His character. He was gracious. That's quite peculiar isn't it? But, notice that **Jonah's theology was correct.**

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He said that the reason he didn't want to go to Nineveh in the first place was because, he knew that God was merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love, and that he is eager to turn back from destroying people. He knew that about God. There was nothing wrong with Jonah's theology. His knowledge of God was correct. He knew that if he went and preached to the Ninevites he would run the risk that they would repent and God would not destroy them.

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**Isaiah 29:13 (NLT)**

**And so the Lord says, "These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote.**

They don't have a relationship with me. They just have a religion. There are well meaning people who call themselves Christians, and who are so very proud of themselves because of their great biblical knowledge and they think they have their theology all figured out, but their hearts are far from God. They are mean, judgmental, critical, and have no idea that God has, above all, called them to work their theology out by growing in their capacity to love one another so that others would see Jesus in them and be saved. It's a sad, pathetic story.

In chapter four of Jonah, for the first time, we find out his motive for running away from God. His theology was good, but his heart was far from God. He didn't want God to save the Ninevites. He knew that if he preached the message God had given him and they repented God would save them. And he didn't want to take that risk, because the Assyrians were enemies of the Jews. And that's exactly what happened. They all repented. So now he's mad. He throws a temper tantrum. **His theology was right, but his heart was wrong.**

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**<sup>4</sup> The LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry about this?"**

Jonah doesn't answer.

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**<sup>5</sup> Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see what would happen to the city.** Jonah gives God the silent treatment.

Our family used to go to the top of what was called Scotsman's Hill in Calgary when I was a kid when the Calgary Stampede was on so that we could watch the fireworks.

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There was a great panoramic view of the city from there. We would get there plenty early because parking was hard to find as it got closer to the starting time. We would get a bucket of KFC chicken, or go to Peter's Drive-in and get some burgers, fries and milkshakes and we'd eat then we'd sing together while we waited for the show to start.

This is sort of what Jonah does. He finds a good view of the city on top of a hill. He makes a shelter for himself and he waits to see if God really is going to hold back His wrath. And he was hoping for a good show. If he was lucky God would rain down fire from heaven and destroy everyone in the city. Jonah wanted God to destroy Nineveh.

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**<sup>6</sup> And the LORD God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah's head, shading him from the sun. This eased his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant.**

Jonah is sitting on the top of this hill, pouting. He is acting like a little child. It is hilarious -- in a pathetic kind of way. And the thing that baffles me is that God doesn't slap him around like he deserves, and like I would probably do if I were God. God, like a good parent, is going to take this opportunity show him what grace looks like. So, He arranges for a vine to grow by Jonah so that he has shade for his head.

That's what God is like. Ruth and I are tempted to get anxious about our situation because it's been four months now and our house hasn't sold and we are moving into the slow market as far as real estate goes. What if the house doesn't sell and we are still living apart in a year from now? We are tempted to question God, and ask a lot of why questions. But, God has been so amazingly gracious. During this time he has been strengthening us and blessings us in so many ways. We are actually very thankful -- so you can stop feeling sorry for us. God in his good time will allow our house to sell and we will buy a house in Campbell River and Ruth will get settled into the life here. God is good all the time.

So, God in his grace arranged for a plant to grow and give Jonah some shade in the heat of the day. And Jonah settled in. He liked the vine. What a great place to wait for God to show His wrath to the Ninevites.

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**<sup>7</sup> But God also arranged for a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant so that it withered away. <sup>8</sup> And as the sun grew hot, God arranged for a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat**

**down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. "Death is certainly better than living like this!" he exclaimed.**

Just as God used the vine to show Jonah what grace looks like, he now uses a worm to eat the vine and make Jonah uncomfortable so that he can draw him into His grace.

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**Sometimes the best thing for us is to be uncomfortable.** Listen very carefully. God's goal for us is not to make us comfortable. Sometimes it's the exact opposite. His goal for us is that we would be transformed by his grace so that we become more like Jesus — so that the world would see him through us and might be saved. That is always God's plan, but transformation never happens when we are comfortable. It can't. It always happens when the heat is turned up. And that's why James said,

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**James 1:2-4 (NLT)**

**2 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. 3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.**

Sorry to break the news to you, friends, but the only way we grow is through suffering. I wish there was another way, but there is not.

Well, God gives Jonah another chance to practice becoming godly, but instead he throws another temper tantrum and again wishes death upon himself. He's Mr. Hollywood. So much drama. He's like a spoiled child. And God always responds to him with such grace.

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**9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?"**

Now, you would think that a rational adult would see the logic here. Jonah didn't deserve the vine. He didn't work for it. God, in his grace, gave it to him even while he was acting like a spoiled drama queen. **"Do you have a right to be angry, Jonah?"**

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**"Yes," Jonah retorted, "even angry enough to die!"**

That is hilariously sad. And I think it's even sadder because we do the same thing to God. Everything that we have is from God. The Bible says in **James 1:17,**

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**17 Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father...**

And yet we lull ourselves into believing that the things that we have accumulated, whether it's our wealth and possessions, or the talents we have, or our knowledge, or our health, or friends, or our church or whatever, are ours because of our great prowess or acumen. We earned them -- we think. We forget that we would have none of those things if it weren't for the grace of God. And then when, for some reason, we lose one or more of them or things change we get angry as if we deserved them. And we forget about God's grace.

But, that's not even the worst of it. Jonah cared more about the vine than he did about the Ninevites.

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**10 Then the LORD said, "You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. 11 But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn't I feel sorry for such a great city?"<sup>1</sup>**

We are stricken by the same disease as Jonah had. We get so caught up with our lives. We think that our agenda is so important. We get so busy trying to accomplish the things that we think will justify our existence that we walk right on by lost people who God desperately wants to extend his grace to. Or, maybe we think that they don't deserve God's grace, which is true, but it implies that we, for some reason do. That's stinking thinking. Or, we're afraid to step out of our comfort zone so we just go on with life as usual because we don't want to disrupt our very important schedule.

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Ruth and I have been quite convicted about this in our own lives. It has been much harder for us to mix with un-churched since I've been a pastor than it was before. Our lives can easily become all about church. As a matter of fact, the statistics are that after two years most new Christians lose the vast majority of their contact with un-churched people. That is a shame. There is such a thing as being too involved in the church.

A few years ago Ruth and I were praying about what to do for ourselves, and so we started praying for our neighbours. We prayed that God would set up some divine appointments so that we could get to know some of them better and learn how to love them.

We decided that it wouldn't happen unless we were purposeful about it so we invited some of them over for a potluck dinner. We invited our manager who is a retired widower, a Sikh family across the hall, and a single mother and her young son from upstairs. This was way out of our comfort zone. Our lives were predictable before. We would come home to our sanctuary and it was simple. Our lives were complicated enough without having to disrupt things by inviting Ninevites over. What would we talk about? What if the night was a disaster and we ended up hating each other?

We did it anyway. We cooked a roast beef, and potatoes, and veggies, and the Indian lady across the hall brought a bunch of Indian food. We had such a good time. The plan was to just get to know them, love them and see what God did with the relationships down the road as they get developed. Sunday night, the little guy upstairs dropped in before going out trick or treating and just hung out with us. So, we played some chess and checkers. He dropped in during my time out after a long day. He felt comfortable doing this because he had been to our place for dinner.

Sundays I usually get up around 4:00am and I'm usually wasted by mid-afternoon. So, usually what I did Sunday evenings was lie on the couch and sleep the night away. That is my proverbial vine. It's my "me" time. But, we were able to experience God's grace in a way that wouldn't have been possible had I thought that my vine was more important than those Ninevites. We can so easily get so wrapped up in our agendas and our important lives that we miss the people that God has put right under our noses.

The narrative of Jonah doesn't really have a conclusion. It ends with God asking Jonah why he cares about the plant more than the 120,000 Ninevites that God so desperately wants to extend His grace to. Why is he so concerned about the plant when he did nothing to earn it, when he did not deserve it, and when it is something so temporal? And yet he has no concern whatsoever with people who have their eternal destiny at stake. He doesn't want salvation to come to Nineveh. That's been his problem all along, right from the get go, back in Jonah 1:1. And now, here we are at the end of the book and there is no conclusion.

It's as if God left it that way so that we have to ask the question for ourselves. What's important to us? Do we go about our lives so concerned about our comfort that we miss out on the salvation that God wants to extend to those around us? Do we get so wrapped up in our lives and our agendas that we can't see our neighbours, friends, classmates, colleagues as people who desperately need the grace of God? And are we willing to step out from under that vine that has become our comfort zone and share a little of the grace that God has given us?

I want to end by sharing an email that I got from Ruth's mother. Annette is quite an amazing lady. She's 79 years young. She is full of life. She has more energy than Ruth and I put together. And she loves to serve and help people. And she hasn't stopped growing in maturity. And I like her because she listens to my sermons online and says encouraging things about them. Here's an email from her. I've changed the names in the email to protect the privacy of her friends.

Good Morning Jeff:

Over the last month or two I have been praying to God to help me help 4 ladies in the Lodge who all are close friends of mine and are having problems getting along with one elderly lady. She is [a famous hockey player's] Mom and she is full of life - in almost every direction. Most lodgers find her a breath of fresh air and a person who loves to love everyone and be loved by everyone. These 4 ladies find her annoying and have caused her sadness and even some feelings of depression knowing that there would be those who disliked her. She is 92 and starting to lose her memory. The manager is somewhat religious and cannot understand that this is happening to 4 women who belong to the local Church. During these 2 months I have told God that I would be willing to visit these ladies. He has definitely let me know that He would like me to do that. But first He dealt with me in my devotions and in all the sermons I have been listening to. I have been properly convicted of the big beams in my eyes, and slowly - much like Jonah - I have admitted them to all the people involved and received forgiveness from them and peace with God. In the last few days I felt finished with listening and confessing and suddenly felt ready to go out.

I had a strong feeling to start with [Susan]<sup>2</sup>. We had a wonderful hour. She had already been convicted of how she had treated [Agnes] and had gone to her room and apologized and got forgiveness and peace. Then she told the manager what she had done. This was exactly what I wanted each lady to do. It would bring peace to [Agnes] and it would be a great testimony to the manager. I have felt an urgency for this to happen before [Agnes] loses her memory altogether. I now feel convinced that God and I were working together!! [Susan] and I prayed fervently together for God's help with the remaining ladies.

That was last night. This morning it was too frosty to do my 1/2 walk outside, so I biked my bike and bounded my boulder in front of my computer while catching up on your sermons. While listening to Jonah 1, you said many things that were just right for my

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<sup>2</sup> Names have been changed to protect privacy.

next step. So I thanked God for His help through you and I will tape your message onto a cassette and take it with me. I am still waiting for the who and the when, but I now have the "with what". So far I have today and tomorrow free.

Bless you.

Love, Annette.

She sent me several emails chronicling her progress since this email. And God has used her to help all the ladies find peace with each other. I think that this is just amazing. Ruth's mother is 79 years old and she is still actively growing in her walk with God. She is still purposefully asking God how she can mature in her faith. She is always looking for ways that she can minister to others. And usually she has to step out from under the safety and comfort of that vine and with fear and trepidation trust that God's grace is available for her and for the "Ninevites" that she was ministering to.

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**How many people do we pass by because we think that our agendas are too important to be disrupted?** We have such high opinions of ourselves. God cares so much about the 35,000 people in Campbell River. He cares so much about your neighbours, friends, colleagues, classmates, and family. Let's pray together that God would instil in us a heart like his. Let's pray that God would develop in us eyes that see those people as one's that Christ died for, and that He would give us the courage to step out from under our comfortable, safe places and love those that God has given us to love.



**Jonah: The Reluctant Evangelist  
Outside Our Comfort Zone  
Week of November 17th, 2013  
Jonah 4**

**Objective:** To allow the Spirit of Jesus to change our hearts so that our eyes are open to what he is doing outside the church walls and join him in that.

**Worship** (5-10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. Have someone read Psalm 111 meditatively to the group.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

**Welcome** (5-10 minutes)

Icebreaker: What's a silly thing that you got angry about this week?

**Word** (30 - 40 minutes)

1. What stood out for you from the sermon?
2. Briefly review together the events that lead up to chapter 4.
3. Read Jonah chapter 4.

This chapter is about perspectives, God's and Jonah's: what they are, how they lead to choices and behaviour, and how God lovingly and patiently works on changing ours to be like His.

4. It is a story of God and Jonah's interaction, which reveals what was driving each of them.  
Go through the story, in order from the beginning to the end, and look at the interactions:

- \* What does Jonah say and do?
- \* What are the things that affected his emotions?
- \* What was driving his behaviour?
- \* How does God engage with Jonah?
- \* What are the questions He asks Jonah?
- \* What are the things He provides for Jonah? For what purpose?

Quotes from the sermon:

"God, like a good parent, is going to take this opportunity to show him what grace looks like."  
"Well, God gives Jonah another chance to practice becoming godly."

5. Now consider perspectives:
  - \* What was Jonah's theology?
  - \* What was missing from Jonah's theology?
  - \* Why was it emotionally difficult for Jonah to care about the Ninevites?
  - \* What was God's perspective?

Through the course of this chapter, God is taking the time and effort to communicate with Jonah, and invites Jonah to become more like Him, until the end where He reveals His heart, His motivation. This is an awesome privilege, to be shown why God does what He does, and to be invited to go along with Him.

**Work** (30 - 40 minutes)

Consider this quote from the sermon:

"God has, above all, called us to work out our theology by growing in our capacity to love."

Also, we heard a lot about comfort zones. There are various ways God takes us outside our comfort zones:

- \* He calls us to love people outside our comfort zones, even our enemies. (The Ninevites were fierce enemies of the Jews.)
- \* In love and grace, He faces us with our immaturity.
- \* He teaches us, broadens our perspective.

1. How has God done each of the above for you?

How has He lovingly parented you, shown you where you need to grow, nudged you to move outside of your comfort zone?  
How is He challenging you to grow in your capacity to love?

2. We all need to grow! What are some ways you can relate to Jonah?

3. Discuss some ways you could extend God's love to people outside your comfort zone, as individuals and as a Growth Group.