

Jonah jealous of a generous God. How about you?

Bible reference for sermon Jonah 3:10-4:11 and Matt 20:1-16

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

4 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning, for I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment.

This is a true story of my conversation with a doctor. When he found out I was a pastor he told me of a time when he was confronted by a patient who was heavily guarded by police. The patient went into cardiac arrest and the doctor revived him. The man was apparently a murderer and had committed heinous crimes. Some of those on the spot angrily questioned the doctor. Why did you save him?

Why would you?

Would God?

Let's look through the eyes of Jonah and Nineveh.

You know the story. Jonah is really a bit of a guts ache, isn't he? Nothing but nothing is right it seems and it results in grumbling and anger and trouble for Jonah!

First: God calls Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and cry out against it for the people's great wickedness against God. So, Jonah answers by running and jumping on ship the opposite way going to Tarshish. Now just to put this into some perspective and the lengths that Jonah was going to, to run from God:

Nineveh was the capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire situated on the banks of the Tigris River in what today is northern Iraq.

Tarshish on the other hand has been located by historians and scholars as being on the coast of Spain. This is a distance of about 4000 kms to almost 5000 kms and would have represented the width of the known world from far east to far west. Jonah was on a mission to avoid God and his call. In response God kicks up quite a storm and Jonah is thrown overboard as the cause of it all.

But God rescues Jonah in the whale where he camps for 3 days and nights. Jonah gives thanks to the Lord, for hearing his voice and rescuing him.

God calls Jonah again to go to Nineveh. “Go there and proclaim the message that I tell you”, God says.

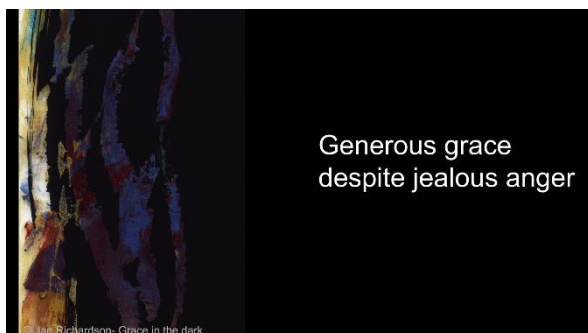
This time Jonah does what God asks of him.

“Forty more days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

The king and the people hear and repent... When God saw what they did, he changed his mind about the calamity, and he did not do it. Like the doctor who revived the criminal, why would you? That seems to be Jonah’s question at God’s generous act of saving grace.

And do you remember Jonah’s response to his successful mission??

“But this was very displeasing to Jonah and became angry!” he gives up. He loses focus. He lies down under a bush which God causes to wither, and Jonah says it’s better for me to die than to live.



And here’s the rub for you and me.

⁹ But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰ Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should I not

be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?”

Jonah judges. God graciously generously saves. God shows that he is the God of mercy and love and grace for people.

¹¹ And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?”

Would Jonah have saved that criminal?

Would you? Would I? Does Jonah’s sense of justice and injustice connect with you? How do you feel about Nineveh which is saved through the Word of God calling the people to turn back to God from their evil ways?

Do we too struggle with a sense of injustice, and do we judge others who don't seem to match our idea of what it is to be a Christian or to live a proper Christian life? Do we get angry and fail to hear God and his call for us when we judge others?

In today's gospel reading there are those who labour all day in a vineyard. Those who were hired first grumbled. The well-known parable tells the story of a landowner who needs workers for his vineyard. He pays a good fair wage to those he calls from the marketplace to do a full day's work. Not everyone in the labour market got work. Work in itself is a huge blessing for those and their families who get work. And through the day the vineyard owner calls more workers even with the end of the day approaching he calls workers at the eleventh hour.

All of these workers who have been blessed to receive a day's work are paid at the end of the day. ⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' ⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius

A denarius was a good fair day's pay. Those hired last receive a denarius. Those hired first now expect more. But they too receive a denarius.

And their response?

Straight out of the Jonah playbook

¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'

They judged.

Would they save the criminal? Are they right?

The landowner answers them though very, very clearly.

He replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Are you envious sometimes? Envious of others who seem to have received so much? Envious that God has given others more? Or that it's unfair that Jonny come lately get what they don't deserve?

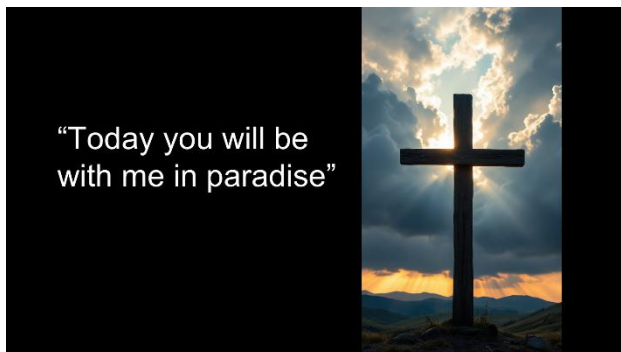
Are we who have had the gospel and known faith in our lives sometimes like the workers in the vineyard who expect more because of something we've done more or better or

more faithfully? Or perhaps our family has always worked hard for the church that we should be recognised?

Luther, like Augustine before him, pictured the Original Sin of humans as us being curved in on ourselves. And perhaps that's what we see in Jonah and in the all day workers and in you and me when we grumble and complain against our generous God.

Would he actually save that criminal?

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." ⁴³ He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:39-43)



Today!

Today God saves the criminal!

Today I am here in my gracious, generous presence with life for you.

Today I come to you in Nineveh and forgive

Today I come to speak to you in my Word and to nourish for your life in this week ahead

And one day Jesus will come personally to you and call you gently "Today, today is the day that you will be with me in paradise." And until then, learn what it is that I am generous and gracious, slow to anger and full of steadfast love for my people. Let us learn anew to repent, to open up to God and to open up to others with God's grace.

Until then learn from me and walk in my rhythms. For I am slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for you. and so can you do likewise with my gospel. Learn to hear Jesus call to us...to you "be gracious and fulsome and generous with my Word of promise, with my invitation of love and with my promise of life."

Today. Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>