

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY
NOVEMBER 5/6, 2016

1ST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

JONAH (the whole story - selected verses); MATTHEW 6:7-15

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever been hurt deeply, had your heart cut to the quick?
Has someone ruined the life of a loved one, a neighbor or a friend?
Do you despise: a Hillary supporter... or one who's voting for Donald?
Whom would you refuse to visit even if ordered to do so by our God?



If there's one thing we can tap into pretty easily in Jonah's story, it's his **anger** – a symptom of the times in which we live. From *road rage* to *cop killings*, and from *bullying* to *Black Lives Matter*, our society seems to be reeling from a Pandora's box full of troubles.

Do you remember that story from Greek mythology? The main god Zeus was angry when one another god gave fire to Man. So he created the first woman, Pandora, and sent her to earth with a little container commanding that she should never open it. Well, guess what happens: the box gets opened. And out of it flies every kind of trouble: sickness, worry, crime, anger and hate.

It's the Greek version of Adam and Eve - and until the day that Christ comes again, so it **will be** even as it **has been**. Jonah **hates** the people of Nineveh – and he has **very good reasons** for doing so.



Nineveh was the seat of government for King Sennacherib of Assyria. You're looking at part of a massive stone etching that lined a whole room in the palace in Nineveh. The engraving tells the story of the King's triumph over his enemies, in particular the country of Israel.

-https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachish_relief

Thankfully, we can't see all the gruesome details that are obvious when you're standing in front of it. But know this: the conquerors were brutal, merciless and had a thirst for spilling blood and causing pain.

This is ***the king***, this is ***the country***, these are ***the people*** to whom Jonah is sent to proclaim God's word. Now, if it'd been a word of ***certain doom*** he'd been called to communicate, I'm thinking that Jonah would have **jumped** at the chance to watch those Ninevites burn.

Instead – and as a **prophet** he knows this about **God**... because it's **anchored** in his heart, it **flows** through his blood, it's an essential part of his **spirit**, his **soul**. He **knows** that the **lives** of those blasted Ninevites might very well be **saved**, that their **city** might just be **spared**, that Jonah's God might very well **forgive every last one of them all their sins**... and **that's** an act of **grace** he **cannot abide** – not for **them**, not for **what they did**, not **now**... and *maybe* not **ever**!



So the prophet hops on a ship and sails in the opposite direction. Now, we know that Adam and Eve tried to hide themselves in the Garden of Eden, right?...*how'd that work for them?* Not so good.

And we know that the young Moses fled Egypt and hid from God in the desert hills of Sinai...*how'd that work for him?* Again, not so good. Trying to **hide** from **God** is like, well, like *trying to stop aging*. It's just not going to happen!

In Psalm 139:7-12, the psalmist writes:

⁷ *Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?*

⁸ *If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in the realm of the dead, you are there.*

⁹ *If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,*

¹⁰ *even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.*

Not **only** can the prophet **NOT** hide from God, but he **also** endangers the lives of the boat's **crew** in the **process**. They're all worried about the storm...*except Jonah* – he sees **God's** fingerprints **all over** it. The sailors cast lots and (surprise, surprise) the storm turns out to be **Jonah's** problem. They ask, *What shall we do??* Jonah says, *Throw me overboard.*

But these are good people and they can't bring themselves to do it. So they try rowing to safety with all their might – yet the storm soon threatens to sink the entire boat, so they finally take Jonah up on his offer and toss him overboard...

Well, we know what happens to our reluctant prophet – he takes a little three-day vacation in the belly of a whale! But what happens to that crew of foreigners? Well...they become God-fearing sailors!

This is the **story** of **Jonah**. He's the most successful prophet in the Bible...and it's **NOT** because he's **spiritual, honorable, devoted, or determined to succeed** in his **calling**. In **fact**, he does his **best to thwart** God's plan to have a word preached to Jonah's enemies.

The 1992 movie entitled simply, Hero, stars Dustin Hoffman as Bernie Laplante, a small-time crook with a prickly personality. He's as unlucky as he is unlikeable, and the only light in his life is his young son, whom he continually disappoints with broken promises.

One dark, rainy night while Bernie's walking through the city, suddenly a huge passenger jet makes a crash landing very close to where he is. He's surprised, he's scared, and he's angry because he's the only one around to help. So, against his will, and against his better judgement, he climbs into the burning, wrecked airliner, time after time, and hauls people to safety.

54 people he rescues – complaining every step of the way. Then he slips off into the darkness, back into his small-time life and doesn't think anything of it. Little does he know that one of the people he saved was an up-and-coming newswoman (played by Geena Davis). She desperately wants to find the man who saved her, and convinces her boss that it'd be a great story to put up a \$1 million reward for the hero of the hour.

Well, someone **else** steps forward to claim the prize – one who knows enough about the story to make the lie work. He's showered with praise, and honor, and glory – and really seems to be a great guy – actually donates most of the money to charities.

When Bernie finally hears about the swindle, he says to his favorite bartender:
What would you think if I told you that I was the one who saved all those people?

The bartender snorts and says, *No offense, Bernie, but it's a **character** thing – you'd never do something like that!*

It seems like it may be a **character** thing for our anti-hero Jonah as well. When he receives the call to go, he doesn't say YES or NO – he just skulks off in the middle of the night, hops a ship in the opposite direction and thinks/hopes/dreams that he can give God the slip.

Then, when he finally delivers his message to the Ninevites, they actually heed his warning and turn their hearts to the Lord...which angers Jonah to the core. In fact, he shows more concern for a leafy bush that dies than for the 120,000 people (and their animals!) who could have died had he not done his duty.

That's the dark side of this Jonah story, the bad part of the good, the sinner part of the saint (and there **has** to be a saint here, right?, because we're celebrating the festival of All Saints today!).

And there is. And Jonah *is* the saint – though certainly not by virtue of anything that's essentially good or honorable in him. But then that's the truth for just about everyone who's truly a saint.

It's not about *being saintly*, about being so **holier-than-thou** that they **walk on water**, **never** have doubts, won't **ever** **swat** a mosquito and always...**brush** their **teeth** after **every meal**... I don't know – but you know what I mean, right?

The One who makes Jonah a saint in this wonderful story...is **God!** Jonah's response to God's call is...dis-honorable.

His cavalier attitude to his ship-mates' lives is...deplorable.

His disdain for the Ninevites (and their animals!)...is disgraceful.

And yet...because of Jonah:

-those sailors become devout believers in God. AND because of Jonah:

-all the Ninevites (and their animals!) become followers of God as well.

No, Jonah is very successful in carrying out God's mission...but only because God makes it so.

-When Jonah escapes on a ship, God says, *I can fix that.*

-When Jonah prays from inside the whale, God says, *I can fix that too.*

-When Jonah finally delivers his half-hearted, half-felt, half-mumbled sermon to the Ninevites - our Heavenly Father seems to smile and say...*I can work with that too!*

And we all say a HUGE thankyou to God for Jonah, because...Jonah is...you and me. Wouldn't you agree that oftentimes we're *all* the spittin' image of this reluctant prophet?

from *as* to *is*



In our Men's bible study (we meet weekly – 6:30 a.m. at Mike's Café for any of you men who'd like to come), we're reading that great book called, What's so Amazing about Grace? In the chapters we looked at last week, the author mentions the challenge of praying that one almost-impossible phrase in the Lord's Prayer:

forgive us our sins/trespases AS we forgive...

If I could have written that part of the Lord's Prayer – I would have said,

forgive us our sins/trespases AS we'd like to forgive...

But that's not what Jesus prayed. To refresh our memories, and even though we're going to sing it in a little bit, let's pray the Lord's Prayer together right now. You can find it printed inside the back cover of the hymnal – we'll use the old version. Together we pray:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Thanks be to God for good old Jonah – he’s the living icon of our struggle to forgive those who (*we believe!*) deserve no forgiveness...

What makes it all possible for us to live as God’s chosen people – chosen to bring a Word of God’s grace and forgiveness to all people in Jesus Christ – what makes it possible for us to do that, and do it well, is the move from *as* to *is*.



This happens most clearly in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. When Jesus takes the bread he says, *This IS my body*. And when he takes the cup he says, *This IS my blood...given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins*.

And in that moment we’re blessed to have Jesus himself truly present *for us* – he removes the worst of who we are and, at the very same time, gives us the very best of himself. That’s reason to hope, isn’t it?

Ironically, after Pandora opened her box and burst into tears once all those vices and evils had escaped, she happened to notice one last thing left in the box. It wasn't ugly like the others – in fact, it was very beautiful. It was the gift of hope that Zeus included to keep people going when the world's troubles threatened to overwhelm them.

Now, that's a nice little image to hold on to – although it hardly seems fair: one little virtue verses all the wickedness that can plague us in life.

Well, thanks be to God that we're not left with just a little hope in a box, but with the gift of a living hope that comes from being known and loved by God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.



These two are tied intimately together: hope and the Lord's Supper. Says the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 11:26 *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

In the simple act of gathering as God's people and sharing Jesus' body and blood, we're proclaiming a word of hope, *hope that's built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.* It's hope for us, it's hope for our enemies, it's hope for everyone everywhere...forever and ever. Amen.