

Jonah

We are excited to be taking part in your missions month, and looking forward to being here with you and getting to know many of you better. We have a long history with Brandywine, Kristen more than me but we got married in the old sanctuary almost 34 years ago and have visited the church many times over the years on holidays or special occasions. While we have a long history of being associated with Brandywine and even being one of your missionaries we recognize that for the majority of you we are relatively unknown people. Because most of the time when we visit we have taken a very low-key approach and spent the majority of our time with Kristen's family and friends. So this week we are looking forward to getting to know some more of you and for you to hear our hearts and about the place and people that God has called us to minister to in this season of our life.

I'm sorry that I didn't bring my Kilt, but to satisfy your curiosity here is a photo of me in my kilt. **Kilt photo** That way you won't be distracted the whole time by my attire. We are looking forward to sharing more about the beautiful place of Scotland this week and specifically teenagers in Scotland, the demographic that God has called us to minister to. **(picture of us)** as you can see it's beautiful in so many ways. And while has beautiful and breathtaking scenery the spiritual climate of Scotland can be fairly dark these days because of how far the gospel message has receded in Scotland. Less than 5% are involved in a faith community and amongst teenagers that is less than 1%. We do believe we are beginning to see a shift of those numbers, a slow shift, especially amongst young people but it's still a very spiritually dark climate at the moment. We will talk a bit more about that at Mission's dinner on Friday and next Sunday in classes.

When we first talked with Nate about coming and he mentioned studying the book of Jonah and that he would probably be talking from Jonah 3 I was like REALLY..... Couldn't I have like a NT passage or something from the gospels? . But I will say that as I have studied and as I have tried to figure out what it is that this book is trying to tell us about God's story. I have been more and more drawn into the story and convicted myself.

It's such an intriguing narrative and does such a fantastic job of creatively highlighting the heart of God and how he deals with us as his children, and his deep love for those who aren't in a relationship with him yet.

As Nate as mentioned before Jonah is not the model prophet or even a great example of the type of attitude we would intuitively think a prophet should have. That is one of the reasons I love the Bible, the honesty that it gives us and how it shows us the triumphs and the failings of its people. It shows us how so often they don't measure up to what God desires from them. I realize that I'm in good company when I read the Bible and I'm so thankful God shows me the frailties of His people! Because I know my own junk and how in need of Grace I am.

But getting back to Jonah. If you have been here the last few weeks you know God commissioned Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against its wickedness but instead of obeying he went in the opposite direction as far away from Nineveh as he could conceive at that time.

He ran and said I don't want to do it?

Ever wonder Why didn't he want to go? Was he scared, was he prejudiced against the Ninevites? Was he just too busy with other things? Did he hate to travel? Was he ashamed? What compelled a Prophet of God, one whose whole Job was to tell the people what God had told him? Why Refuse to Go to Nineveh? Nate has alluded to it a few times over the last few weeks and today I'll go a little bit more into it.

The Book of Jonah has so many interesting ideas that can be plumbed and discovered for sure but I think **It's about at least two things!**

1. The Unrelenting Grace of God

We will see as we go through the passage that Grace is in for both Jonah and the Ninevites.

2. The mirror it puts to our soul to confront our heart toward sinners.

It shows us this through the lens of Jonah and his divided heart.

I believe All of us have these divided hearts (that are at times full of mercy and at times full of judgment) We all want mercy and grace for ourselves and the people we love, but many times, the people we don't think deserve mercy or grace shouldn't get it. Like it's our place to tell God who is worthy!

If you didn't know it, it's not your job to determine who is Worthy! Because, none of us are, no matter what you think about yourself! **None of us are worthy! As Nate said: all people are spiritually, eternally lost without a saving relationship with Jesus (that includes you and me)**

This Series is called *The Missionary God*.

As Nate has said

“ we are caught up in the grand story of God's saving mission through the gospel of Jesus. And so the church is not a Christian country club. The church is an outpost in God's missionary adventure to the world!”

But **What is the Church?** it's God's people, “that is the church” it's not the building or the event or even the gathering. The church is us and how God wants to show himself strong through his people and **invites us to partner** with him to bring his great redeeming love to all peoples!

God really doesn't need us to get His message out, but he has **chosen us** to communicate His message to the world. Sometimes, I'm not sure why, but he has! And Many times at best we are **reluctant messengers**, just like Jonah!

You know it's funny. We live in this great country of Scotland now with a long history of of being divided into clans!

Clans were just groups that basically thought our clan is better than yours.

Whether we want to admit it or not our History influences us: (for good and bad)

They are divided by faith expressions (Protestant or Catholic) (Church of Scotland,Free Church or Baptist, Presbyterian).

By Football teams or, as Americans call it, Soccer teams. By geography or cities (you have the borders, the highlands, the kingdom of Fife, Edinburg, Glasgow!

To this day, it still determines a wee bit who you associate with and who is in your clan, so to speak.

Every country we have lived in does the same thing in one way or the other. Without thinking about it, we intuitively divide ourselves up in different ways!

- politically
- Religiously
- Economically
- Generationally
- Race
- Sex
- Cats or dogs

- TikTok or Instagram
- Cowboys & Eagles

All sorts of ways that we put ourselves into US and THEM instead of WE!

Jonah and the people of God were no different. God is using the story of Jonah to **illuminate** the issue and say, "**Pay attention**, because it's causing you to lose sight of what you are all about as a people!"

Our church in Stirling has been going through the book of Genesis, and a few weeks ago we looked at Genesis 12 and the covenant that God set up with Abraham.

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
Genesis 12:2-3 NIV

From the beginning, God is saying I'm choosing a people to show myself through. I'm going to bless them and make them a great nation so that they can be a blessing!

I'm not blessing them for their benefit alone, NO it's that others will be blessed and be able to see what a *compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love God is all about!*

The People of Israel were to be these image-bearers to the nations of How Great God is: One of our jobs as the church the People of God is do the same thing:

Paul in the NT put it this way:

"So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"
2 Corinthians 5:20 (NLT)

But Somewhere along the way Jonah forgot his main calling as a Prophet which was to proclaim the message that God gives him and tell it to the people God sends him to.....but Jonah it seems was only comfortable sharing the message with the people he wanted to share with, but God had other plans!

So God sends a storm and a fish, and Jonah comes to his senses in the belly of the fish and realizes that **"Salvation comes from the LORD."** Thus, he has the right to call whomever he wants!

Now, we can debate whether Jonah's heart changes or is just going through the motions and obeying out of duty, but we come to Chapter 3.

Jonah 3

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:

I'm so thankful for this statement...**our failures are not final!** (Some of you need to hear that) Chapters 3 & 4 very much mirror chapters 1 & 2. 3 starts out the same way as chapter 1. The Word of the Lord came to Jonah! It throws in this line a second time to highlight for us that God is giving Jonah another shot he is saying, Hey, you dropped the ball the first time and ran away, **but that is not the end of the story!**

I'm giving you another shot....This is such a great kindness from God toward Jonah. Do you think God knew Jonah's heart and his reluctance and his attitude toward Nineveh. Yeah, but he still chose to allow Jonah the opportunity to obey! God could have left him in the belly of the fish and chose someone else who was more "worthy" or willing! But he keeps extending His Grace to Jonah throughout his whole book. He does the same for us! Some of you think you have screwed up way too many times for God to still want to use you in His plans. NO, even amid our own stubbornness, God is continually giving us opportunities to get in line with

his ways and follow his plans! Grace just isn't for the pagans for salvation....I am so thankful that His Grace continues to exist for His stubborn children!

2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

GO...it takes effort, it takes intentionality to GO, our faith is meant to be an active expression, not just a silent assent to belief. Another version says it this way... GET UP and GO! I think we often want God to bring all the people to us, and at times, HE will, because it's His heart that all should hear. But the Great Commission is about going. Take the initiative to put yourself in places where you are around people who haven't heard the message, who don't know the story, who don't know the truth, who are hurting and need hope. It doesn't take a lot of effort to put yourself in those situations. Most of you work, or go to school, or attend a gym or go to restaurants or go shopping in places that have all kinds of people like that!

You may say well I don't know any of them and I'm not comfortable talking to people I don't know. Well that is a great way to start a routine pick a few places where you are going to get to know the people where you eat, shop, work, workout and then start praying for them and ask God for an opportunity and then notice how he begins to open those doors and then have the courage to walk through them! Don't worry about closing the deal, just be faithful, share and let the Holy Spirit guide you and let Him draw the people when it's their time. EXAMPLE?

Let me give you an example. When we moved to Stirling in 2020, we needed to furnish our flat but because of Covid, stores were closed. Kristen went online and discovered a woman called Marion who was giving away a nice couch. When we went to pick it up we began talking with Marion, and her husband Gordon and discovered that both Marion and Kristen are former English teachers who loved reading and sharing books with teenagers. That began a friendship between them - they swap books with each other, have coffee every few weeks, share stories of their travels around the world, and occasionally, Marion, who has some wounds from a bad church experience long ago, allows for conversations about faith and how Christ has changed Kristen's life. When Marion's mother died in October, Kristen was the only non-family member that Marion invited to the funeral. Kristen has earned the right to speak into Marion's life, and it all started because we needed a couch.

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

4 Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

That's the message. Your city is going to be destroyed! When I was listening to one of Tim Keller's old messages about Jonah. He said this was maybe one of the worst gospel message presentations ever! (which I tend to agree with)but this seemed to be the message God told him to deliver. I think we sometimes have this false narrative in our culture that we should only preach mercy and love but the fact is that the Bible, Jesus and God have never been squeamish to call out wickedness & sin. The issue is that when there is no grace with that truth, it becomes full of hate, religion, and exclusion instead of the gospel. The Bible tells us in John 1 that Jesus was full of **grace and truth!** It's not an either-or. Without grace, we become hateful, spiteful, self-righteous people, but without Truth we become permissive and rationalize Sin that God never wanted us to tolerate. But we need both, and if you are honest, you probably lean naturally one way more than another! If you are all about the truth you probably need to cultivate grace in your life, and if you are all about grace, you need to develop more truth in your life and heart!

But Jonah's message should encourage us to realize that our job is just to say what God tells us to say and he will work in people's hearts as he sees fit. The key is saying what the Lord tells us, not just what we want to say! Which many times is easier said than done and requires cultivating a sensitivity to listening to the Spirit in your life.

5 *The Ninevites believed God.* What a great statement!

A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

6 *When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. **7** This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:*

"By the decree of the king and his nobles:

*Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. **8** But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. **9** Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."*

The whole city repented; the greatest miracle in Jonah has nothing to do with the fish! It's that the wicked, far from God, idol-worshipping, violent, oppressive, hateful pagans REPENTED and turned to God, **not knowing if they would be spared or not!** But the great city, from the greatest to the least repented and came to God.

Some folks I have read have questioned if this was true repentance by the Ninevites, but I'm prone to think it was because Jesus in both Luke and Matthew says this:

³⁹ But Jesus replied, "Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

⁴¹ "The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent.

Matthew 12:38-41

Both Jonah & Jesus were sent by God but had very different attitudes.... Jesus is greater than Jonah (Where Jonah was reluctant, Jesus was willing, Where Jonah sought punishment, Jesus offered forgiveness; where Jonah sits outside the city in judgment, Jesus weeps for the cities and has compassion for them).

We see the irony of this where Nineveh repents after hearing from this flawed prophet. People in His day and our day look at a perfect Jesus and fail to repent. !

The end of Chapter 3 says this:

10 *When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

This should be one of the greatest joys in the life of a prophet for the people to listen, repent, and turn to God. That is what we all pray and hope as missionaries and preachers is that when people hear the message pierces their hearts, and they turn from their wicked ways and repent and turn to God. This is amazing and miraculous! God has mercy on them; they are now our brothers and sisters in the faith! Those that were lost are now found! Most of the children's books end the story of Jonah here with this great revival and this great ending. All the people repent and are saved after Jonah obeys the LORD finally and goes to Ninevehit's such a happy ending.....

But unlike children's books, the bible gives us the whole unvarnished truth!

That is not how the story ends though....

HOW DOES JONAH RESPOND to this incredible wonderful revival.

Full of Joy and thankfulness at the LORD's mercy.

He is not rejoicing for the lost sinners like heaven is doing! Let's see

4

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "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."

Jonah is ticked at God because he forgives them! The Assyrians, the people who have been persecuting the Israelites, the ones who are child killers, the ones who have defamed God, the ones who worship idols, the people who have abused them, the ones who have been evil! And he says You have the audacity to FORGIVE THEM how dare you God!

You should punish them!!!!!! They deserve it!!!!

If we are honest we aren't much different than Jonah. We all have people or groups that we think don't deserve God's mercy! They deserve His punishment, God is going to show them!

But that is not the heart of God.

The heart of God is that All should come to Repentance....EVEN THE ONES YOU THINK AREN'T WORTHY OF IT!

IT's NOT US & THEM - God sees WE.

How about YOU or ME?

Now out loud you would never say that you think only certain people deserve it but in your heart of hearts and how you act and treat people it's what you truly believe.

Look what Jesus Says in Luke 6:32-36

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. **35** But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

That is the way of Jesus and one that Jonah wanted no part of! He would rather that God enacted punishment and destroy them because He hated them! But God has a heart for all people, even the wicked ones!

Unpopular news....He expects us to have that same heart!

Because we are his image bearers, his ambassadors who are supposed to represent the King to the world

What is your heart toward people?

The lovely ones and the unlovely ones?

We've been working with lost teenagers for the last 34 years, and I can tell you that the biggest hindrance to many of them truly coming to faith in Jesus has not been a problem with Jesus's claims; it's been God's people (the church) being incredibly poor models of His heart to them!

That is the Story of My Dad as well!

-He basically wanted no part of Christianity because of the way that he had been treated by most Christians growing up and how He couldn't see anything different or life-giving in them in the ones he knew. Thankfully, because God is this great pursuer of people, a few of us had come to know Christ in our family, and over a few years, he began to see the changes in us, and God started to soften His heart and in His 50's my Dad surrendered to a relationship with Jesus. When people asked him years later what changed his mind, he would always say, I couldn't deny what was happening around me in my own family any longer!

God's heart is for People (You, Me, Us,them, WE)

God goes and has gone to great lengths to rescue people, both those in the fold and those outside of it!

Where is your heart toward sinners.....I want you to sit for a moment and ponder that question:
Does your heart sit in an attitude of judgment or in compassion toward sinners?

Pause for a few moments:

Indifference is judgment....compassion propels us to action.

Ending: