

Jonah 4

There is one thing that Jonah is **very happy** about in this story.

What is it? The plant. So let's start there.

Jonah is very happy about the plant. He is happy to have a God who protects him from the hot summer sun.

And we are not told, but Jonah was surely very, very happy to be hurled onto the beach and find he is still alive. He is happy to have a God who hears his cry for help and saves him from the death he deserves.

Jonah is happy that the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness **to Jonah!**

Jonah knows God's love. That is the most important thing for Jonah and for any one of us to know. Life starts with knowing God's love.

Here in our church we want to make sure that we know God's love and never forget it. That is why every single Sunday, especially during the time of our service that we call the confession and assurance, we say again, "God sent Jesus Christ to be our Saviour, Jesus died on the cross for us while we were sinners!"

Even when we die, our comfort is that we belong to Jesus. We are safe with him. One day he will raise us to life again, not just our souls, but our bodies, these bodies, somehow will be raised to life again, like his own glorious body.

It is great to have Jesus as our Saviour!

God loves us and cares for us!

When I look into “the mirror” of this story and see happy Jonah under the protection of the shady plant God has given him I see the same smile and the same relief and joy that we have on our faces.

But Jonah has an issue with God.

Maybe we do too.

His issue with God is that God loves too much. That’s why we see Jonah sitting east of the city of Nineveh, hot with anger.

God loves all people. **Including our enemies.** Now that’s nice for our enemies. It is a nice thing that God loves all people. It’s a nice thing that God even loves the enemies of his own people.

I am a sinner. God loves me. Why shouldn’t God love other sinners?

Jonah’s issue is a bit different.

Suppose that you were abused and bullied as a child by a teacher. You told your parents. They acted to protect you. You had to testify. The teacher was held to account. But this Christmas, when you go to your parents’ home, they say, “we have a special guest for dinner”. And as you take off your boots and look over into the living room, you see, already at the dining room table, the same teacher.

Jonah’s issue is that he was asked to deliver the invitation.

The God who loves us **calls us** to bring the invitation to all people, even the people who have hurt us, or hurt and attacked his people, the church.

This call of God is really the call to follow him into a new story. It is a call to turn our backs on a different call. **The old story is the story of isolation and death:**

That old story goes along these lines. Life and faith are personal matters. What anyone believes is their own business. What anyone does is their own business. But, when someone hurts you, get even. Take your enemy down.

It is the story of every great action movie. The story ends with the enemies destroyed on the battlefield. Dust settles on the enemies as the heroes walk into the sunset of a new future.

The call to violence and revenge is popular. This week on the first day of sales, 4.7 million copies of "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2" were sold in North America and the UK, bringing in \$310 million dollars.

The enemy is going down!

In the Second World War 50 million people died. In Rwanda 800,000. We pause and remember one day in November and sometimes we say, like my friend Murray said to me at the ceremony downtown on Wednesday. "When will we ever learn?"

My grandparents and parents were liberated by Canadian soldiers with their guns and tanks and planes and bombs, I know full well that there can be a time to fight. I know that weapons can be used to set the oppressed free.

And yet, how will we ever “learn” if we see violence as entertainment?
How will the reflexes of love, patience, kindness and forgiveness ever get any
workout if our adrenaline kicks come from blowing enemies away?

That way is the way of death.

Against the “Call of Duty” comes the call of Jesus.

Jesus gave his life for us on the cross while we were his enemies.

Listen to Jesus: Jesus takes it way past the Jonah style call to warn our
enemies of God’s judgement.

²⁷“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. ³⁴And 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. ³⁵But 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 sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.** ³⁶**Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.**

How is this sounding to you?

It sounds terribly hard to me. It is hard to think about personally. It is really hard to think about being used by God to bring his grace to my enemy.

It is hard to think about and think of the Taliban, or of Nazi Germany. Some who lived through those times or the years following still have trouble with Germans, or Japanese, or Russians.

How hard is it? Is it hard enough that it reminds you of the times you have had this thought....? It would kill me to.... approach him with an honest warning and the forgiveness of God? Or, "I would rather die than....."

If you have, then maybe you will understand Jonah. And maybe you will understand the strangest part of his story, his **death wish**.

What is that about? I think it goes like this. Jonah himself tells us that he could see how the story will unfold the moment the Lord called him. He could see that if the Ninevites repented, the Lord would forgive them and they would be welcomed into the people of God. Jonah has lived with his hatred for the Ninevites for so long that he cannot imagine his life without that hatred. He cannot imagine life where the Assyrians would join the people of God around the table and at the altar. He would rather die than follow the Lord into the new future and into the new story.

Jonah is right. It will take his death. It does take the death of our hatred and of our bitterness to speak that word of warning and grace to our enemies, knowing that God will forgive and love and welcome them home.

But Jesus did not just die for us. He rose for us. And he gave us his own Spirit to live in us. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from death is alive in you and me. In the strength and life of Jesus we begin to live that new life. In the

strength of Jesus, we perform death defying acts, calling all people, even our enemies to new life in Jesus.

What does this mean for us as a congregation? What does this look like? How can we together reach out to greedy, self-absorbed people who think violence is great entertainment?

There is a group of people who are leading the way in this new story. As a people group they have many reasons to respond with bitterness, and anger and hatred. Their personal lives and the lives of their community have been shattered. But some of them have heard the call of Jesus.

Here is their song. As you read these words, remember families destroyed by residential schools. Remember addictions and suffering and racism and prejudice and stereotyping..

(It is by Broken Walls, a native Canadian Christian band.

www.brokenwalls.com . The song is called, Rise Up Mighty Warrior.)

Here it is in part:

The one who was rejected,
because of hardness in their heart
The One who took the pain,
paid the price for our new start
This very One who died, gave us reason to live
To give love to those who've mistreated us
and a heart to forgive.

To all who've suffered, at the hands of another
Come out from the bitterness,
Come out from the shame
The God of creation, He's calling out your name
Turn to those with love, who have only brought you pain.

So rise up mighty warrior rise up
And receive what only God can give

He gives life, through the blood of Jesus Christ
He gives love, and the strength to forgive.

These brothers and sisters in Christ are leading the way for us all.

May the Lord be gracious to you. May the Lord be gracious to me.

May the Lord be gracious to our enemies.

And all God's people said, Amen.

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