

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 01.25.15 Epiphany 3b

Day One: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

You remember Jonah. He was the man who ran away from God's mission, and God brought him back forcefully by means of a great fish.

Now Jonah finally travels to Nineveh because he is forced to, but he still does not love the people there. It's ironic that God calls him to preach a message of divine judgment, and yet God loves these people deeply. Jonah is reluctant to speak these harsh words, and yet he doesn't really care for them.

When we refuse to confront evil, are we being loving? Or is it just our indifference?

So Jonah delivers God's message and the wicked and violent people of Nineveh actually repent! And Jonah is sad because he was hoping they would be punished.

Is this how you feel? Would you like to see violent people punished – or would you like to see them repent and find God's forgiveness?

God makes a plant grow up quickly to give Jonah shade, and a short time later he sends an insect to kill it. When Jonah grieves for the loss of his shade, then God points out that Jonah loved this plant more than the thousands of people in the city of Nineveh.

Do you prefer plants to people? "Green acres is the place to be," we might sing. Like Jonah, we might look at big cities and their problems – poverty, racism, violent crime, corruption – and we love to judge them. But God has called us to the city, with all its complexities, because he loves the people more than the plants!

Prayer: *Father in heaven, forgive me for my silence. I have not spoken up against injustice, even murder. I have not taken a stand against wrong. Worse, I have not stood up to show the right, your amazing mercy. Lord, give me the courage to speak. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Cor. 7:29-35

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

My brother's car has over 250,000 miles on it. He used to fix everything that went wrong in it, but as the miles add up he is less willing to invest in expensive repairs.

We all take good care of our homes because we know they have to last us a very long time. We had strict rules about playing in the house because we didn't want anything to be broken. But my father once owned a house that he planned to demolish. When my brother and I played there, no one cared if a window broke or a door was left open. In a short time it would be a pile of rubble.

Paul says we should not be "engrossed" in the things of this world for they are passing away. All the things that we value so much have a clock

running down on their value. They are useful now, but only for a time.

Instead, we ought to be engrossed in those things that matter – the things that really last. And what would that be?

You can still visit the ancient city of Nineveh. It is a pile of rubble. All its glorious walls and buildings were long ago destroyed. But the people who lived there have an eternal existence, either with God who loved them, or separated from him forever.

"This world in its present form is passing away." Are you spending too much time polishing something that will soon enough be gone?

What (or who) do you need to pay greater attention to?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, you give me my daily bread. Grant that I may not become engrossed in it, or fret about it, but let me receive it with trust and thanksgiving, and use it to your glory. Father, you have given me a more precious gift, someone you love, and you allow me to care for them. Help me seize the time today. Amen.*

Day Three: Mark 1:14-20

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Cartoons of a prophetic character calling people to "Repent!" are very common. Mostly we think people like that are crazy – or that they are angry or hateful. They are pictured with heavy beards, their hair wild and dirty, their eyes wide in alarm, and shouting a message of warning while they wave a sign.

Actually, some of them are trying to imitate John the Baptist and the famous description of his camel's hair clothing, leather belt, and diet of locusts.

All of this seems fitting to us, since we consider the repentance message to be very bad news. Jonah too thought that "repent" was bad news for the people of Nineveh.

But here in our gospel lesson (a word that means "good news") it's not a wild-eyed prophet that is shouting about repentance. It's Jesus!

Mark introduces the scene this way, that Jesus was

"proclaiming the good news of God." And this is how Jesus' message starts: "The time has come!"

Try this for yourself. If you are in a private place, try saying this loudly to yourself, "The time has come!"

Does that sound like good news or bad news to you? Jesus connects it to the same message of repentance that John preached. And he "warns" us that "the kingdom of God is near." But look what he calls it: "Repent and believe the good news!"

It is wonderful to know that the time has come. Something good is coming! And repentance just means turning back toward our heavenly Father, turning back toward home.

To a person who has been wandering lost – to a world that has been trapped in sin and death – that's fabulous news! You can come home again!

Prayer: *Now, Jesus! Now, let me proclaim the good news with you also! The time has come. The time of waiting is drawing to a close. Inspire me to tell others that your kingdom is near to them! Amen.*

Day Four: Lam. 3:21-24

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

Hope is often a feeble word. We use it in situations where we have nothing left, no way out, no solution, no cure. “All we have left is hope.” If we say that “we hope for a cure,” we all understand that we’re not expecting immediate help. Instead, we are describing a feeling of longing for something that may come... eventually.

Jeremiah, the author of the Lamentations, has been called “the weeping prophet” because he so often wrote about the hardship of his life. In one sense, you could say that Jeremiah was truly hopeless. The people around him were hoping that God would rescue their country from powerful enemies. But Jeremiah knew, because God had told him, that they were going to lose – and lose badly.

Jeremiah knew that his beloved city of Jerusalem was

going to be leveled, and all the people cruelly dragged off to Babylon. None of them would ever see home again – only their grandchildren or great grandchildren.

And yet it is Jeremiah who says that he has hope because he remembers this, that God’s love is steadfast and it never stops. He remembers that God’s mercies start fresh again every morning. He remembers that God is faithful.

The Michigan District of our church body has a theme: People of Hope... vigorously making known the love of Christ. If we have the kind of hope that Jeremiah had, hope that comes from knowing the character and love of God, then we don’t just long for a good result in the end. We are filled with confidence in the love and faithfulness of God.

And how would such a person live? We will not only have the strength to endure through great trials, like Jeremiah, but also to proclaim the wonderful news, like him.

Prayer: *Father in heaven, give me hope. Give me hope that is built on nothing less than the blood and righteousness of Jesus, given for me. Amen.*