

Sermon Jonah 3 1 5 10 3rd Sunday after Epiphany Series B

Sermon: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Theme: Go and proclaim

Goal: God does His work through fragile and reluctant men

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Do you know the story of Jonah? Maybe you remember it from your Sunday School classes. Have you ever heard a sermon on Jonah? I cannot remember...

Jonah was a prophet called by God and sent to preach to the people of Nineveh, a foreign city in the Assyrian region (now Iran and Iraq). They were historical enemies of the Israelites. Even so, God wanted to give them a chance to repentance and sent Jonah to them. But Jonah didn't obey God and ran away from the Lord. He took a ship in the harbour of Jaffa and had planned to go to Tarshish. But God doesn't give up His sovereign plan. A violent storm arose and the ship threatened to break up. All sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain woke him up and asked him to pray to his God too. Jonah said: "I am a Hebrew and worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land... I am running away from the Lord... Pick me up and throw me into the sea and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." The sailors were reluctant to do this, but eventually they threw Jonah into the sea. And the raging sea grew calm. All the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him! – But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights (Jonah 1).

Chapter two records Jonah's prayer inside the fish. He repented and asked for mercy. "And the Lord commanded the fish. And it vomited Jonah onto dry land" (Jonah 2). - Then we come to our text.

I – God calls and sends

"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."

"A second time." God is merciful and He doesn't give up His plan. He calls again and again. – How many times did God call you?

The Gospel told us about the calling of the first disciples (Mark 1:14-20). Peter and Andrew, John and James were called from their job to follow Jesus. It was not necessary a second call. They obeyed and followed Jesus immediately.... not like Jonah, who ran away from God when he was called the first time. Jonah had a hard experience running away from God. But he learned from his experience. God is always present, wherever I go, and He has good plans for me.

A call to follow Jesus doesn't mean necessarily to be a preacher, a "fisher of men", as Jesus promised to His first disciples. To follow Jesus means just to follow Jesus – by faith and obedience, by living a new life. In Luther's time, to enter a monastery and to be a priest was the highest vocation someone could aspire to. But Luther explained the "Doctrine of Vocation" in a broader sense: If you are a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, worker and so on. You don't need to be a pastor or a missionary who goes to foreign lands to preach God's Word. Wherever you are and whatever you do, if you have faith in Jesus and live according to His will, you are following Him. And sometimes, without you acknowledging it, your light is shining around you and you are giving a good testimony to your fellows. Don't run away from God's call, but obey Him and do His will.

## II – God gives the message

The message God gave to Jonah is the same message as Jesus was preaching in the Gospel for today (Mark 1:14-20); and the same message His disciples were taught to preach: Repent and believe! It is the same “old-new” message the church is still preaching. Amidst the sins and corruption of humankind, God sends His messengers to preach repentance. God said through Ezekiel (33:11): “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.”

So, Jonah began to preach repentance: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” It seems to be a very hard preaching of condemnation. But if God had wanted to destroy those people, He wouldn't have sent Jonah to preach to them. *Jonah's message to the Ninevites was not simply that punishment was coming because of their sinfulness, but also that a forty-day period of grace would be given the time to repent* (ABC 1047).

We are still in a period of grace. Almost 2000 years have passed since Jesus' death and resurrection. The living Christ sent His disciples to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name (Luke 24:47); and the church is accomplishing this task. God's mercy is still available to all who believe. Peter wrote: “The Lord is patient which you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

## III – God's Word is powerful

The Ninevites accepted Jonah's preaching. “They believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” as a sign of deep repentance. Even the king made a decree and said: “Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will

not perish. – When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.”

Can we imagine what would happen if our people and our authorities would listen to God’s message to turn from their evil ways? Instead of this, people are running away from God’s will and they are calling God’s condemnation upon them.– Be merciful, o Lord!

Conclusion: The story of Jonah is considered by many as a tale, not as a real story, which did happen. They say that it is impossible for a wale to swallow a man. They say that it is impossible for a man to survive for three days in the belly of a fish. But look: The Bible doesn’t say it was a wale. God provided a great fish. – Above all, Jesus gave credit to this story when he quoted it as a sign of His own resurrection: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the hearth” (Matthew 12:40). The same powerful God who raised Jesus from the dead had allowed Jonah to survive in the belly of the great fish. God has His purpose: To prepare people to preach His Word, even if they go through very bad experiences in their own personal lives.

God is calling you and me to proclaim His message in a wicked world through words and deeds. God gives us His message in full in the Holy Bible: His law which calls to repentance, and His Gospel which offers forgiveness through faith in Christ. God blesses His message in the heart of the listeners. Our task is to proclaim it. The result comes from God. He is still merciful. Amen.