

**Hebrew Scripture READING**

**JONAH 3:1-5, 10**

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup>So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

<sup>10</sup>When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

**GOSPEL Reading**

**MARK 1:14-20**

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”**

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, **“Follow me** and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>**Immediately** he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

I Don't Know What We're Yelling About!

## Introduction

This week Christians around the world are celebrating Christian Unity Week, yet there is division like no other in today's churches. There's lots of yelling in American culture these days. We hear it on talk shows, in political campaigns, radio—people trying to get their side of the story heard...yet not always willing to listen to the other perspectives.

Today's sermon title comes from a scene in a movie comedy called 'Anchorman' where the character named Brick Tamland comes into a **newsroom** filled with people yelling back and forth at each other, and as he is **overwhelmed with the emotion** of the scene he yells overtop all of them: 'I don't know what we're yelling about!' It's a humorous commentary on the situation, but there's some spiritual depth to such a statement today.

Today's churches are no different: just turn on the television to hear preachers 'proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.' But which good news is it? Is it that God loves America or hates America? That God loves gay people or hates gay people? That God blesses your life, or punishes your life? The lists go on and on. **Is this the one body of Christ that we read of?** It's with messages like these being cast along the television, internet, emails, and dinner tables that I can understand a person who says to me, 'Jeff, I think you're a nice guy and all, but Christianity is full of hypocrites, and I don't want anything to do with it.' Know of anyone like this? Maybe you're one of them, with your own questions and doubts.

So we are faced with a challenge this morning: come up with a clear message to share the Good News of Christ, or to admit to being just another religious group of hypocrites.

Tim Keller, in 'The Prodigal God,' the book our Sunday morning Bible Study group is reading, further challenges us as he writes: 'If the preaching of our ministers and the practice of our parishioners do not have the same effect on people that Jesus had, then we must not be declaring the same message that Jesus did.' (p.19)

So **what are we** all yelling about? And is anyone listening? Luckily for us (and for everyone else), the clear message is not only left to our own devices, but to the work of God...let's look at the scripture texts.

### **Scripture**

Does everyone know the story of Jonah? If not, I urge you to take a few minutes to read through it; it's only a few pages. It's one of my favorite stories, and I learn something new each time I read it. We pick up in v. 3: Jonah goes to Nineveh reluctantly. For those of you unfamiliar with the story, Jonah knows about God, but has actually been trying to escape God up until this point, where just previously God has enough of Jonah's antics and has a giant fish swallow him up. But here we have in v. 3 that Jonah finally agrees to what God told him to do all along and share God's message of repentance in Nineveh.

(Did I ever tell you I met Jonah? TRUE STORY, but I'll save that for another time)

Anyways, in v. 4 we read that Nineveh is a BIG city! Why would they listen to this outsider? How could he convince an entire city to change their ways?

But in v. 5: the people 'believed God' and

v. 10: God 'changed his mind' God cared for Nineveh; God cared for the outsiders

This is an AMAZING turn of events for Jonah who was convinced that there was no chance of salvation for 'those people'.

There's a similar story of God calling people with the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Here we have in v. 15 after sharing the story of John the Baptist, Jesus now saying **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."**

He goes on to seek out these fishermen, who are also not always the most pious individuals in the world (maybe some of you have hung around the docks long enough to know what I'm talking about). But in vv. 18 & 20 the text says 'immediately' they followed him. God cared for the fishermen; God cared for the outsiders.

### **Response**

What are we yelling about?

Are Jonah and Jesus yelling about the same thing? Or is it different? Jonah says in v. 4, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Jesus says in v. 15, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."**

Jonah did not know, exactly, what he was calling for, but God did. Let me clarify, Jonah THOUGHT he knew what he was yelling about; he thought he was proclaiming God's displeasure and coming punishment to unfaithful people (because Jonah was such a better, more faithful person; right?).

**But God was inviting these outsiders into new life and salvation.**

'Repent, and believe in the Good News.' What does this mean? The fishermen didn't know exactly what to expect, but Jesus did. In fact, throughout the gospel of Mark the disciples THOUGHT they knew what Jesus was talking about with his teachings and parables, but they kept missing the point. **Jesus was inviting them, and all people, into new life.**

We hear in both passages about **repentance**; so what is this? If you were to read more of the Jonah story, you would read that the king proclaimed a fast for the entire kingdom, and he wore sackcloth. In the Gospel stories we read of people giving their money to the poor, leaving their jobs, and becoming 'the least'. Repentance gets pushed aside and dismissed in many circles, but it's an integral part of this morning's message. When we repent, we acknowledge our brokenness, and we **act to remedy these broken parts** of our lives. We can discuss this further at another time, but the important thing to note is that **repentance is an integral part of the response** in the lives of those mentioned in this morning's texts, and in our own lives.

This morning we hear an invitation from God. Are we, today, likely to respond in repentance like the people of Nineveh and Galilee, and be willing to follow immediately?

And here is how this works in the texts, and in our lives right here today: it's The message and invitation:

1. **Share or hear the message of God's love.** This is the gospel message. This is sometimes the hardest part for Presbyterians; we seem to think of the gospel message as a 'personal' thing...did Jonah and Jesus?
2. **Response:** Acknowledge the brokenness & Repent. We need to **act**. This may take someone close to you; someone to be honest with you.
3. **Follow** (Discipleship). What would it look like for you to follow Christ? People follow Christ in different ways; you need to discern what is most faithful to your life.

I sum it up in this way: **God's love is given; discipleship (or living our lives following Christ) is our response.**

Our Presbyterian heritage is filled with insight and faithfulness. This comes from the beginning of the Book of Order, our church constitution:

In our own time, we affirm that, in the power of the Spirit, the Church is faithful to the mission of Christ as it: ***Proclaims and hears the Word of God, responding*** to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and **inviting** all people to participate in that new creation;

### **Celebration**

We have reason to celebrate this morning. **God's message is of grace and unconditional love...to everyone.** This is one message that must celebrate as the Church today! When we proclaim such a message, we share an **irresistible** invitation for all people to respond to, just as the people of Nineveh and Galilee.

How many people do you know that can hear these words today: I know you're not perfect; no one is. But God loves you, and I love you, and you can have **a new life** if you want. What Good News we have to share with our friends and family, our neighbors and co-workers!

God is calling to the outsider, the sinner. God is calling those who are broken and imperfect. And you know what, God is calling the insiders as well, those with money and power, and those who 'THINK' they have it all figured out in life. Whether you think you're on the outside, or the inside, God is calling you. God is inviting YOU to new life in Christ.

And it's not yelling; it's an invitation that we all hear if we listen hard enough...and this is something that all of us can unite in proclaiming: **the kingdom of God is near; repent, and hear the good news.**

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Most loving God, we gather this morning in prayer for your works on this earth. Each and every day we are so blessed to have you in our lives. We thank you for the daily gifts of health, family, friends, and love.

Lord, in a world with so many blessings, it is hard to understand why there is so much hurt and pain this world; why there is so much sin and brokenness. We pray for your healing presence here this morning.

We pray for the people of Colombia, Syria, Egypt, Guatamala, and Nigeria; for those countries and communities that suffer from daily violence, conflict, and uncertainty.

We pray for our own nation and communities. We ask that you make your presence known in our neighborhoods and streets, and that you use us to share your Good News.

Most loving God, we pray for the families of those suffering loss this week. We pray for the friends and family of Ralph Whitehead and Ken Rice, and the many other families that are grieving loss.

Holy God we pray for this church—your church. We pray that we may grow closer to you this week, as we seek your invitation to new life.

We pray all of these things, spoken and not spoken, as we dare to pray the faithful words Jesus taught us: 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Forever. Amen.