

Jonah's Prayer, Our Prayer

By: Rev. Mark Breese

Pastor Mark is the Agency Minister and the Director of Ministry & Community partnerships at Community Missions.

Jonah was swallowed by a fish. That is what everyone remembers. I mean, it IS a stunning development in the story being told. Jonah is (deliberately) tossed into the sea during a storm and everyone, Jonah included, is certain he will drown—and let's face it, that IS what was going to happen. But "salvation" comes to Jonah. He is eaten by a huge fish. If you had never heard the story before, you would be like, Yikes! Didn't see that coming!



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Although there are lots of lessons in the book of Jonah, but today I think we need to focus on the ultimate reason ended up becoming fish food. At the beginning of the story, God says to Jonah "Go at once to Nineveh, and cry out against it. . ." God wants Jonah to deliver a message to the city that they need to stop doing whatever they were doing and act differently—be a better people.

Jonah wanted nothing to do with this. He knew that prophets had a pretty rough time. No one liked them. They spoke hard truths. They were rejected and worse sometimes. He also knew that, in the end, the people would come around and start following God's will once more, and God would forgive them and bring them better times. So why go at all? It always went the same way, and no matter how it went, it was not going to be a good time for him. So Jonah did a runner.

Of course, God pursued him. God nagged. God did not give up on Jonah. God had a purpose for him in life, and made sure that Jonah would be able to fulfill that purpose—even if it meant getting eaten by a fish as part of the path to that purpose. Jonah is in the belly of the fish for 3 days and is spit upon the shores of Nineveh.

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I believe that God cares about us and always points us towards a purpose in life. Sometimes it is a long range purpose. Sometimes it a purpose that is more

immediate. Either way, it is always a purpose that leans towards bringing love and goodness into the world. No matter what the future may hold, God will always be pointing us towards that goal—increasing the love and goodness in the world.

God is relentless about this. You can ignore that little tickle in your brain that urges you to do the good, kind, loving thing. You can pretend not to feel that urge at all. You can hear it, know what you need to do, and just do the complete opposite—run away from it like Jonah did – like literally heading in the opposite direction! Doesn't matter. God will keep reminding, keep pursuing, keep trying to nudge you in the direction of the good.

And here is the especially important point for today: Sometimes it seems that the stuff of life can separate us from God's desire for us to follow that call to increase love in the world. Sometimes the world, it seems, confines us and places such completely insurmountable barriers around us that we will never be able to move forward. We feel swallowed up, whole, like Jonah. The story seems over, but it is not. That is when we need to remember how God is always with us. We need to remember Jonah's prayer.

Jonah Chapter 2

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying,

“I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how^[a] shall I look again upon your holy temple?’

The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O LORD my God.

As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.

But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!”

Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

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