

*Begrudgingly*

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***Jonah 3:1-10***

*The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." 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. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.*

*When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish."*

*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.*

This summer I was given the gift of spending a bunch of quality time with my family. I went on a two week, 9 state, road trip with my mom. I attended a family reunion with more than 60 members of my dad's extended family. And last week my brother and his family came to visit me here in McMinnville. It has been such a gift to have quality time to be fully present with my family.

While hanging out in a swimming pool in Minnesota with my nephew, who is 4, he made the comment "*I am allergic to Spiderman*". I knew I must have miss

understood him, so I asked him to repeat what he said. He again said, “*I am allergic to Spiderman.*” While I know that he loves Spiderman, so I corrected him saying “*you mean you LOVE Spiderman?*” “No,” he corrected me back, and said for a third time, “*I am ALLERGIC to Spiderman.*” I then tried to reason with him explaining what *allergic* meant. He then tried to explain to me that I was wrong because he was *allergic* to Spiderman. We adults laughed about his insistence.

Now his job as a four-year-old is to figure out the world. And there is a lot of world to figure out. He is developing skills like looking for context clues to reason out how objects are used or what words mean. He is also learning how to form opinions and defend his opinions against aunts who think they know better than him. But his insistence on redefining the term *allergic* has stuck with me and made me think about the things I am insistent upon. I am a proud person, and it takes a lot to get me to admit I’m wrong. Humility is a character trait I have to work at. And just like my nephew’s use of the word *allergic* sounded absurd to me, I am sure that my stubborn pride had made me look absurd to others many times.

As we encounter Jonah in our scripture this morning, before we even start reading, we bring with us a knowledge of Jonah’s prior history. God called Jonah, Jonah went the *exact* opposite direction of where he was being called, a big storm came, Jonah asked to be thrown overboard, he was swallowed by a large fish, spent three days in the belly of the large fish, and was thrown up back onto the shore. Jonah is swimming in absurdity and doesn’t have a whole lot of dignity to his name.

So, as we pick up with Jonah in chapter 3, it might come as a surprise that we don’t find Jonah sheepishly slinking back home to restore his diminished pride. Instead, we begin with God. God doesn’t dwell on the poor decisions Jonah has made. God doesn’t ridicule Jonah for his embarrassing mistakes. God doesn’t explain all the ways Jonah went wrong. God simply meets Jonah on the shore and says, “I am still calling you to Nineveh”. And Jonah...begins to walk to Nineveh.

Nineveh is a large city. We are told in our reading that it takes three days to walk across the great city of Nineveh. Here we find Jonah, humbled, begrudgingly doing the task asked of him. This prophet is perhaps now even *more* ideal to bring the message of repentance to Nineveh. And though Jonah doesn’t think

these pagans deserve God's attention, he has also just experienced divine mercy as God gave Jonah a second chance to fulfill his calling. Jonah has experienced God unwavering grace, and he has personally decided that Nineveh is not deserving of the mercy God is offering. Yet Jonah proclaims God's message anyway.

Now here is where the story gets truly remarkable. Nineveh is a pagan city. Meaning it worships many gods and has a variety of faith traditions not associated with the God of Israel; the one true God. As Jonah walks the city proclaiming, "forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" the people of Nineveh believe Jonah. This outsider prophet, who actively despises them is proclaiming that God is going to overthrow them and they believe him. And not only do the people believe, but also the King—filled with power and authority, when the news reaches him, he humbles himself. He immediately takes off his robes and puts on sackcloth. He then issues a decree that everyone—from the king to the lowliest animal—shall fast, don themselves with sackcloth, and cry out to God.

In four short verses the city of Nineveh hears Jonah's message from God, they believe the message, and they repent of their ways. Then we are told that "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed God's mind about the calamity that God said he would bring upon them; and God did not do it." That's it! It's just that simple. They hear God's message, they repent, and God forgives them. Just like God forgave Jonah.

So, what does the story of a humbled, begrudging prophet, a repentant city, and a merciful God, have to do with my four-year-old nephew who thinks he's allergic to everything? I don't know about you, but I identify with a stubborn, absurd four-year-old, more than I do a city that hears the message of God and immediately repents. I identify more with a runaway prophet than I do a merciful God. I identify more with the Jonah that goes down to the bottom of the boat to sleep away a storm, than I do with a King that is quick to show his remorse.

While the misuse of a word by a four-year-old has little repercussions, I am reminded that we are living in a period where we are slow to listen, trust, or believe what others have to say and that has huge repercussions. We are quick to state our opinions and to write off anyone who disagrees. Climate change, election results, voter fraud, vaccine safety, sexual assaults, aliens, mask efficacy,

critical race theory, gender identity, guns, human rights. The list goes on and on. We are quick to formulate responses as to why our crazy neighbors or our misled uncles or our elected representatives are wrong. We are slow to truly listen to understand others point of view. And in turn we are quick to miss God.

Despite our growing list of grievances. Despite our desire to sweep away those who are different. Despite, like Jonah, our proclivity to have preconceived notions about large swaths of people. Despite all of our baggage, God is still at work. God calls us to repent like Nineveh. God calls us to proclaim like Jonah. God calls us to lead with humility like the king. God calls us to listen. God calls us to listen. God calls us to listen. And in turn God is merciful, God is gracious, God is calling.