

July 28, 2024

Season: Ninth Sunday after Pentecost:

Theme: Jesus & his Ancestors

Scripture: Jonah 3:1-5

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, **2** ‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ **3** 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. **4** Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ **5** And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Matthew 12:38-42

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, ‘Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.’ **39** But he answered them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. **40** For just as Jonah was for three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. **41** The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here! **42** The queen of the South will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!’

Sermon Title: Outsider Skeptics

Sermon in a Sentence: Though the harshness of the words “an evil and adulterous generation” can leave a person trembling, Jesus was speaking directly to the religious leaders who were seeking a sign—while the rest of the world can find comfort in the stories of two outsider skeptics offering a witness that changed lives.

Call To Worship - Traditional

ONE: Holy is God!

ALL: And the church has gathered for worship.

ONE: The saints and the skeptics, the devoted and the doubters—all are welcome.

ALL: It is God’s grace that makes space for everyone.

ONE: May our praise and prayers honor the God who has and continues to give beyond measure.

ALL: Thanks be God!

ONE: Let us worship together.

Contemporary Call To Worship: The church gathers for worship! The saints and the skeptics, the devoted and the doubters—all are welcome. It is God’s grace that makes space for everyone! Let us worship....

Opening Prayer: You are holy... and just... and kind. Make yourself known to us, Lord God, as we come together in worship. As our voices join together in songs of praise, it is our hope to meet you anew and to experience your mercy and grace. We pray for this gathering to be more than an exercise in religion. Instead, we want to grow in our understanding of you and become more faithful

to the ways of Jesus. We believe this happens when we humble ourselves and make room for your Spirit to dwell more fully within us. May it be so! Amen.

Traditional Prayer for the People:

ONE: God is always more eager to hear our prayers than we are to pray.

ALL: This is good news for all of us!

ONE: Whether our hearts are fully engaged in the act of prayer or not,

ALL: God is listening.

ONE: May our hearts be bound together.

ALL: May our faithful work begin here in prayer.

ONE: Let us pray...

Holy and Just God, we begin the work of faithful living here in this act of prayer. We seek to calm our minds and emotions as we draw close to you and the eternal Christ who continues to make known the ways of love and kindness. As you have been gracious and merciful to each of us, we pray for any sense of superiority to be pushed aside as we take a step back and appreciate all that we have received. It is not a competition to see who is more righteous, for as the Apostle Paul reminded us, we have all fallen short of your ideal, Lord God, and we are all dependent upon your unconditional love.

For that reason, let us begin in a spirit of gratitude. (Pause) We offer our thanks to you, not because you need our words of thankfulness, but because it is important for us to be reminded over and over again of the gift we have been given in Jesus. It was his life and self-giving love that provided us with a window through which we were able to glimpse the depth and character of your concern for each and every one of us. There are not a select few that have met some sacred bar by which goodness is measured. You meet us where we are and love us in such a way that we are able to become what you envision as possible.

As we continue in worship and look to the table of grace, help each of us to be more than recipients of the meal. Allow for our gratitude to be offered at the table, and then for our lives to give thanks as we become instruments of your grace in the world. We may think it is our place to judge, yet we are reminded that Jesus did not come into the world to condemn it but to heal and redeem it. It is in his name that we offer this prayer. Amen.

Call to Communion: The bread and cup are a reminder of God's grace and kindness. As we partake of the elements, it is a reminder that each of us receives into our bodies and spirits the gift of God, and as those who have been given a gift—no strings attached—we offer a thank you in both word and action. Let us prepare for a time at the table...

Sermon Background: God used two outsider skeptics—Jonah and the Queen of Sheba. Jonah was reluctant and complacent, while the Queen of Sheba refused to believe the witnesses who came to her. Yet even their complacency and disbelief did not negate their impact. Though the passage from Matthew sounds harsh and judgmental, it might in fact offer us hope in our complacency and disbelief. For God finds ways of using such people, even when their complacency still exists and their disbelief requires proof and more proof (1 Kings 10:1-13 & 2 Chronicles 9:1-12). Too often, the Matthean story is quickly interpreted as saying that those who do not believe in the resurrection (three nights in the heart of the earth) will be judged. Matthew 12 contains numerous stories in which Jesus speaks harshly about the religious leaders, and we should not understand them as a general condemnation of all people. In fact, the narrative is discomfiting for the religious leadership, for those who have been the recipients of grace (and have come to recognize the gift that has been given) are the ones who tend to be most generous.

Key Words/Phrases:

Skeptics, Cynics, Doubt, Disbelief

Reversal, the very outsiders condemned will stand in judgment

Will they show mercy?

Music:

All Because of Mercy (Casting Crowns) - change Jesus my Savior bled and died -to- loved died

How He Loves (Crowder)

Amazing Grace and *Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)*

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty

Prayer Response: *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*

Where He Leads Me #346 (specifically vs. 2)