

## REMEMBERING AND LETTING GO

Sometimes I am convinced that humanity's biggest problem and the cause of all sin and separation from God is simply that we can't follow directions or ask for help. I would know... I'm a man... Men are the worst about this. We don't like asking for directions, we don't like taking orders and we don't like asking for help or acting like we're hurt or in need.

You know how guys do that whole, "I'm alright I'm alright..." thing when they are injured? We can be hard-headed and hard to reach. We (and I mean this for ALL of us, male and female just don't let go of our need to be right sometimes. Our need to control and our need to hide our weakness gets us in all kinds of trouble.

Jonah is a story about one such "typical male." It's a funny story- a satire, really about how ridiculous human beings can be and the lengths to which they will go to avoid letting go. Today we get the good side of this story. Jonah prophesies to Nineveh and they repent. They experience a forgiving and merciful God!

But Jonah took a crooked path to get here. Jonah is first challenged by God to go to the city of his enemy- Nineveh. Nineveh- a place full of pagan people doing bad things. (Probably worshipping someone or something they shouldn't.) God tells him to go to Nineveh and to tell them to repent.

I would think that Jonah imagined that this would be a dangerous and unpleasant task. We know that it was something he did not want to do! Who can blame him? Imagine, if you will, having to go to a city that is controlled by.. say The Taliban, and and having to walk the streets yelling "Change your ways...Follow Christ!" This would be a foolish and scary thing to do (and I bet it would not work and would result in your quick demise!)

Jonah tries to escape from this task by jumping on a ship for a trip elsewhere. He winds up swimming in the ocean and then in a whale's belly. Once there, he finally asks God for help and remembers he has a God who can help him. THEN the whale spits him out and today, we see him walking the streets of Nineveh, covered whale vomit, smelling up the place... yelling "REPENT!"

And lo and behold... it works, just as God promised. Jonah succeeds brilliantly! Mission accomplished! Ninevites in sack cloth and ashes: women, children, kings, queens, cattle even.. in sack cloth and ashes.

The midrash (teachings of Rabbis that sort of "fill in the blanks" in the biblical narrative), tell stories about how greatly the Ninevites repented. The people of Nineveh we're so repentant they began to return objects lost in a field, a vineyard, the market place, or the street to their rightful owners.

They tore down the royal palace, returning to their rightful owners all the stolen bricks in the structure. Any vineyard, the midrash says, which had two stolen seedlings was uprooted and returned to the rightful owner; any garment containing stolen thread was unraveled and the thread returned to the rightful owner.”

A city transformed, good to a fault and as repentant as a people could possibly be. Good job Jonah!

One would think that Jonah would have been happy and imagine that he would have joined in with them. Jonah might have rejoiced in their salvation. However, Jonah gets mad at God for NOT destroying Nineveh

Obviously he held some fear, anger or hatred toward these people he was called to save. The story ends with Jonah sitting under a bare bush under the hot sun pouting because God has not destroyed Nineveh. Jonah yells at God for destroying the bush under which he was sitting! He and God have an argument, really, because God yells back... saying:

“Jonah! You ‘pitied’ the shrub, for which you didn’t work and which you didn’t raise; it grew in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> Yet for my part, can’t I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who can’t tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

As far as we know, Jonah sat there in the desert forever, awaiting Nineveh’s destruction. A repentant city below him, rejoicing in reuniting itself with the one God while he fumes off in the bushes, never letting go.

Our gospel today is about people literally letting go, dropping all their things and possessions and following Christ... James, Andrew and Simon-Peter just drop their nets and leave everything, They do what Jonah could not do and they let go. I am sure letting go was not an easy or impulsive thing for them to do.

Perhaps they heard him teaching around the town, and Christ ignited a fire in their bellies that caused them to drop their nets and follow him. Letting go of their past, letting go of their present, letting go of their future, they dropped their nets. They left everything and followed Jesus. Hearing in his words hope and life and salvation.

We too can be hardheaded like Jonah. However we also see that, with God’s help, we can listen. In following Christ there is hope for letting go The good news- the Gospel here is that we do not-should not to do it alone. We are reminded every week in this place in so many ways that Jesus lives and still beckons us forward. Weekly we are invited take him

in to our lives and through God's grace are given hope for letting go. We find him in the grace that surrounds us in this community. We even begin to be people that look for and point out all the many places where resurrection and new life are happening for others. We begin to be people who bring about new life for ourselves and others when we are people who can let go.

My Baptist friends like to compare notes on how many they get at altar calls each week. I joke with my Baptist friends that every week we have an altar call and usually most everyone comes down and accepts Jesus into their hearts! We baptize infants very young because we want to make her know that from the time of birth God is working in him and through him. We have the Eucharistic table and we take in the body and blood of Christ and we make Christ a part of us. Christ becomes our very sustenance and gives us life, enabling us to let go of what separates us from God and one another.

We cling to all kinds of things and we try to remain in control of our lives. But today we see that releasing and relinquishing control is the beginning of life abundant that Jesus calls us to. We are called today to walk the streets of Nineveh, to walk the streets Atlanta, to walk the streets of cascade heights of Fairburn the Fayetteville of Eastpointe of Inman Park and Sandy Springs proclaiming God's love in word and deed. We are called to drop our nets, to let go with God's help and follow Christ...

Amen