

Jonah's Anger at the Lord's Compassion

The Book of Jonah Chapter 4

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo. Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what are hearts can no longer bear, and what has become for us a consuming fire of judgment. Set us free from a past that we cannot change; open to us a future in which we can be changed; and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image; through Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Amen

Prayer used at Pasadena Covenant Church on 2/11/07



Settle Down

Take some time to settle yourself and calm your mind. Breathe deeply and invite the Lord into your awareness. Review where you have been and what you have been doing for the past 24 hours. When did you experience God with you during that time? When did you feel absent from Him? Thank Him.

Scripture Reading

Read Jonah chapter 4 slowly. It is a masterpiece in divine communication. Notice the different ways the Lord communicates with his prophet Jonah. Summarize the argument between the Lord and Jonah in your own words. How does that passage speak to you?

Absurdly Out of Tune

Yahweh's decision to withhold judgment on Nineveh seemed absurd to Jonah. He feared that Nineveh would turn around and destroy Israel, which in the end they did. Who can argue with Yahweh and hope to win, let alone live? Who can debate the Holy One whose wisdom permeates the universe? Yet, he invites a response from his friends. He asked his servant Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry?" When he refused to talk, he tried another tack—a living parable—to coax him out of his angry despair. In the process, Jonah's own absurdity (The word originally meant "out of tune.") is gently exposed.

1st Violinist: "Sir, I refuse to play this music any longer. The composition is out of tune and grates against my ears whenever I hear it. This is the wrong music for me and my people."

Conductor/Composer: "I appreciate you stating your opinion forthrightly, however, the music I have written is an expression of who I am and it sounds correct to me."

1st Violinist: "Then it would be better if you were to fire me because I won't play your music in good faith any longer. You have written a bad composition and I am angry enough to quit."

Conductor/Composer: "Your opinion matters to me. I don't want you to quit." The conductor then picked up his own violin and played a lovely melody that immediately soothed the nerves of the 1st Violinist. When the 1st Violinist was fully relaxed, the conductor directed the trumpeter to play an F

sharp blast on his trumpet. That sound was followed by loud clashing cymbals. The 1st Violinist was so startled he fell on the floor and bumped his head.

1st Violinist: “Why did you do that, Sir? The tune you were playing for me was so beautiful. Why did you go and ruin it? That makes me really angry!”

Conductor/Composer: “My Friend, you are now worried about a piece of music that I wrote and performed for an audience of one—you. As a composer, do I not have the right to also write a piece of music for an audience you know little about, whose music sensibilities differ from yours, and who number in the thousands?”

Readings for Reflection

If I ever had to account for particular evils in my genetic code, the trial would last for centuries. I have slave owners, Protestant invaders of Ireland, and Vikings in my family tree. I have Cromwell loyalist. The unattended colonial nightmares of the British part of my family alone could push the trial into the next millennium. All of the people who had to die to guarantee my existence--if they could stand to give testimony, I couldn't stand the reckoning. *Jessa Crispin in The Dead Ladies Project*

Fundamentalism, be it religious, political, or psychological, is an anxiety management technique that finesses the nuances of doubt and ambiguity through rigid and simplistic belief systems...it is a form of mental illness that seek to repress anxiety, ambiguity, and ambivalence. The more mature the personality structure, the greater the capacity of the person, and the culture, to tolerate the anxiety, ambiguity, and ambivalence that are a necessary and unavoidable dimension of our lives. A culture that is immature, and believes its values besieged, will fall back onto a siege mentality, a sentimental nostalgia for a simpler time, for simplistic black and white value judgments, and will project its own shadow by vilifying others. *James Hollis in Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*

I have never been able to conjure up (as some great Evangelical missionaries have) the appalling vision of the millions who are not only perishing but will inevitably perish. On the other hand...I am not and cannot be a universalist. Between these two extremes I cherish and hope that the majority of the human race will be saved. And I have solid biblical basis for this belief.

John R. W. Stott in *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*

Benediction

Lord Jesus, the story of Jonah has no tidy ending. Your prophet sulks under his makeshift shelter while your question echoes across the ages, “Should I not be concerned for people who cannot tell their right hand from their left.” Help not only your question, but also your compassion echo in my mind as well. And give me courage to engage with you even when I know my logic and motivations are as misguided as Jonah’s. Sort out my mind, heart, and will when it all feels like scrambled eggs to me. Amen

¹ Artwork (Acrylic Collage on Paper, 9 x 12 inches, 2019) and Reflection by Steven Stuckey