

August 1, 2021

Daring Greatly-Jonah-God's Rescuing Work

Jonah 1:17-2:10

¹⁷ But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

² Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, ² 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.

³ 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.

⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; how^[b] shall I look again upon your holy temple?’

⁵ The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head ⁶ 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.

⁷ As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

⁸ Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.

⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!”

¹⁰ Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

This morning we're starting a new preaching series entitled “Daring Greatly” Where we will spend each Sunday exploring men and women In both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures who Dared Greatly as they followed the call of God and journeyed on by faith. The dictionary can help frame meaning for us on the word DARE: as a verb, Dare means to have the courage to do something. Another verb use of dare means to defy or challenge someone to do something. The Bible is full of people who dared greatly and have a story to tell...Like Jonah.

As our kids sang this week...Jonah is a “whale of a tale” and one of the Bible’s literary gems! Throughout the 4 chapters of this Book...there is symmetry, irony, surprises and a **playfulness** that makes it a great story AND a cool VBS theme! I think it fair to say that everybody knows about Jonah. Our kids did a great job learning about him and sharing their skit—Oh Jonah...what a great peek into this prophet of God!

People who have never read the Bible know enough about Jonah to marvel at his whale of a tale. As I said before, there is a playful aspect to his story; a kind of slapstick clumsiness about Jonah as he bumbles his way along...trying repeatedly—but always unsuccessfully—to avoid God, to run away from responsibility as our kids so wisely put it.

Oh Jonah...wait...Pastor Jess is this really who kicks off our series? THIS is who we're starting our Daring Greatly series on? A person appointed by God...called on personally by God to preach to an unruly, wicked city—Nineveh—people who were a clear enemy of the people of God—the Israelites. An enemy people who had done terrible things against God’s people. So God said—Jonah’s “the Man”...he will bring my Word to them...But nope...Jonah decides to run away from God—daring greatly? Not so much.

It is a whale of a tale that while at times is playful—the playfulness is not frivolous, there’s a point being made. So while we are smiling or laughing at Jonah’s miscues and the mess he’s gotten himself into...Oh Jonah...we drop our guard...one that often tries very hard to keep God at a comfortable, safe distance; & suddenly...In the middle of an outrageous story about a fish that swallowed a man and spits him out...we find ourselves caught up in the purposes & commands of God. I think that’s true for all of us. No exceptions.

~How many times have we run away from God?

~Or feel like we’re floundering on a storm-tossed boat?

~Who here knows exactly what it feels like...being thrown overboard into a churning sea, in life right now?
~Or maybe you feel engorged in the bowels of the belly of a fish.
~Perhaps some are feeling like we've been spit out on dry ground.
WE could be Jonah. WE ARE Jonah.

THIS...this is why the story of Jonah is a literary gem And a powerful gift of grace. Stories are THE most prominent biblical way of helping us see ourselves in "the God story;" Scripture tells us story after story...of God's rescuing work or us, within us and through us. These stories—in contrast to abstract statements of truth—stories tease us, lure us, entice us into becoming participants in what is being said...what is being revealed by God through the Holy Spirit's power. We find ourselves involved in the action. We may start out as spectators or critics, but if the story is good—and the biblical stories are VERY good—we find ourselves no longer just listening to, but inhabiting the story...becoming a part of the story.

The Jonah story is so powerful because it nurtures the life of faith in us. Jonah is not a hero too high and mighty for us to identify with. In fact, by most standards, he doesn't do anything that the world might consider "great." Instead of being held up as an ideal to admire, we find Jonah as a companion in our own ineptness, our own struggles. Here is someone on our level.

Even when Jonah does it right—eventually—like preaching, FINALLY in Nineveh—he does it wrong—by getting angry at God for showing mercy & changing God's mind on destroying the city. So Jonah appreciates and is thankful for God's mercy to HIS own disobedience But cannot agree to that kind of mercy for others... whom he deems as not deserving.

But the whole time, God is working within and around and yes THROUGH Jonah's very ineptness and accomplishing God's purposes Through this unlikely prophet. Oh Church...I dare say most of us need a biblical friend or two like Jonah. Someone who runs away, avoiding God's call in his life...But who, while on the cusp of life and death...Calls out for God's saving, rescuing grace.

Ah...and there it is my friends...remember our definition—To **dare** means to have the courage to do something.

*Jonah dared greatly by lifting up a prayer of thanksgiving while in the belly of a fish.

*Jonah dared greatly by trusting that God would hear his prayer And would answer him...Despite his disobedience of God's command to go and preach to Nineveh.

*Jonah dared greatly by trusting in the saving, rescuing work of God. Despite his missteps, ineptness, fear and avoidance of God's plan for his life And God's need for his gifts at this particular moment in the God story of faith, love and mercy for all people. Oh we need a biblical friend like Jonah!

The book of Jonah is a whale of a tale!

~How Jonah dared greatly through PRAYER and trust.

~How the people of Nineveh—the capital city of Assyria, a city filled with Israel's most feared enemies—dared greatly by listening to & believing the prophet Jonah's 8 words from God to repent, and in so doing God spared them.

The story of Jonah shows

~How God also dared greatly...over and over again...using THE most imperfect people imaginable to reveal grace, love and hope to everyone...to ALL.

Oh my friends, we have a God of second chances...Of third, fourth, fifth...to infinity CHANCES!

We have a God who loved the world so much...Daring greatly He gave us his son, Jesus Christ. God's rescuing work throughout the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is the core of our story as the people of God. How is God calling you my friends and me To dare greatly?

God dares greatly again and again using the most unlikely, Imperfect people imaginable...like us! May we have the courage to do something...to become someone that God needs for a time such as this. Amen and amen.