

An Invitation to Love

Jonah 4

Jonah in four Acts

Jonah is about us.

It is about every person who ever encounters God.

It is about our relationship with God and our world in a particular way:

1. Escaping the Inescapable
2. Praying from the Gut
3. Obedience, Repentance & Salvation
4. Invitation to Love

Today, we will study Act 4: An Invitation to Love

Who Needs Salvation

The person in most need of help in this story,

The person most in need of God,

The one who runs from God,

The one who disobeys God

The one who needs to repent

The one who needs salvation,

Is not group of pagan sailors,

Is not the people of Nineveh,

It has and always was Jonah.

Jonah, the prophet.

Jonah, among God's people.

The believer, not the unbeliever.

And this is what the book of Jonah is about.

How we, as the people of God, can in, time miss the plot.

And this final act lays the issue bare.

Here is the problem, or solution God brings: Jonah 3:10

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

The Heart of Jonah

¹But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

The mystery is why.

Why did Jonah run, disobey and now, why his tantrum.

The Key to Jonah's heart.

Why did he do what he did?

Why does he do what he does?

It is about motives.

Why is he angry?

Who is he angry with?

Why is he angry with them?

He is angry because God forgave the Ninevites.

God didn't ignore the sin of the Ninevites.

He did not turn a blind eye.

In fact, he laid justice upon them.

But they turned from their sin.

Jonah is angry with God.

Because God, as Jonah already knew, was compassionate.

He is angry because God is compassionate.

God questions him but he does not answer.

"Is it right for you to be angry?"

Angry Again

⁵Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. ⁷But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.

⁸When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

⁹ *But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."*

Jonah is still wanting destruction on the city.

God gave a plant and then God gave a worm.

The worm ate the plant.

I suppose we can just join hands and sing "The Circle of Life."

Jonah blows his top again and is mad.

At who? He doesn't dare say!

He just threatens non-existence again - twice!

Why is Jonah mad?

Who is he mad at?

What was the plant made for?

Jonah, or the worm?

Who's benefit is Jonah thinking of?

God's Lesson

¹⁰ *But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"*

"You care about this plant.

What do you think I care about?"

How does this passage of Scripture even make it into the Bible?

Who snuck this in?

It is a slap in the face of Jonah.

He is shown to be selfish and self-interested.

I know we have said we come to like him.

I wouldn't use such a word.

Nor should we say we loathe him for his selfishness and unrepentant ways.

If we do so, we become him.

Because, as I have said every week.

This is not about Jonah.

This is about you and I.

We are called to Nineveh.
Vancouver is our Nineveh.
Our office, our school, our family, our home.

We are mad when they raise our taxes,
Make crazy bike lanes,
When people swear or spit or pee into garbage cans at Richmond Centre
We roll our eyes at the bad drivers
We lament the high cost of housing and living.

Or perhaps we are content, even thankful for what we have.
We count our blessings.

But God is not angry with us.
He is not angry with Jonah.
He invited Jonah to see what he sees.
To love those he loves.
To love Nineveh, to love Vancouver.
I asked myself, how do I love a city?
Well, no one actually loves a city.
We enjoy its benefits.
You can love a person.
People.
So who do you love?
I noticed that Jonah was left all alone all the time.
He has no friends in this story.
No one talks to him except God.
Who he frankly treats like rubbish and complains incessantly to.
So to love Nineveh is to love those around me.
But in a city we are all so impersonal.
Where do we get to know people?
Well, we know people at church.
We can get to know our neighbours.
We can get to know people who are in clubs or share interests with us.
With people at work or school.
Some people we like better than others.
But how do we love them?
We tell them our stories.
Spend time to get to know them.
Serve them and let them serve us.
We listen to their stories.

We pray for them.
We be with them.
We see them as people - with compassion.
And we let them love us back.

People in Jesus' time demanded a miracle form him and he said this.
No sign but the sign of Jonah.
Well, what is the sign of Jonah?
God loves and invites people who struggle to love to love.

Prayer

Break into groups and pray for our city.
Pray for people we know who aren't Christian in our work, neighbours.
Pray that we will learn to get to know and love the people around us
and share how God found us with them.