

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Jonah 1:1-17
Sunday, February 12, 2017

Jonah flees from God's presence

1. As a father, one of the best games to play with my kids is hide and seek. I love to let them go off and hide while I count really loudly. Then, after calling out, "Ready or not, here I come!" I recline my seat and don't look for them.
2. If only God was like that. Wouldn't it be great if all we had to do to get away with sin and disobedience to God was to go and hide to do our bad deeds? Kids seem to have this belief that what they do away from our watching eyes they get away with. Kids may openly believe this, but we all live like this even if we wouldn't verbalize it as a belief.
 - a. What I mean is, we sin in secret, and can feel comfortable with it if no one else will find out. But there is no hiding from God.
3. I suspect that Jonah knew that, though his actions suggest otherwise. In ancient times, gods were seen as being local, so fleeing one's country might mean that they could flee from their sight of their god; but Jonah, as a prophet of God, had to know that *his* God, the God of Israel, was so much bigger than just a local deity.
 - a. In fact, the command to go to Nineveh, which caused Jonah to flee in the first place, is evidence that Jonah's God wasn't just provincial.
4. ¹ "Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."
³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord."
5. I find the opening of Jonah to be intriguing because it gets right into the story. God came to Jonah with a command, and by verse three, we already see that Jonah doesn't like the command God gave.

Jonah would rather flee from God than see his enemies receive mercy

1. What was Jonah's problem with the command he received? He was being sent to an especially violent and vile group of people. As he says at the end of this book, Jonah didn't want to go because he knew that if they heard the word of the Lord they would repent and receive his mercy. Jonah did not want to see Nineveh receive mercy.
2. It is so strange to see someone, a prophet of God no-less, who would rather be disobedient to God himself than to be obedient and see others receive mercy.
3. What we see in Jonah is that the refusal to obey God doesn't just bring calamity in our own lives. Jonah boarded a ship with people who had no idea he was a sinner, yet their boat was rocked by a terrible storm and they had to throw all their cargo overboard. It wasn't until Jonah confessed that he was the problem and they threw him overboard that they were freed from the wake of his sin.
 - a. In our own lives, it isn't always so neat and clean as just casting the sinner out from among us and having things go back to normal.
4. Jonah really is a sad, but funny story. In punishment for his disobedience he gets swallowed by a giant fish. He lives in the fish for three days until he repents. He finally does go to Nineveh and preaches and the whole city repents. When God shows them

mercy, Jonah is angry. God then sends a plant to provide shade for Jonah, and just as Jonah gets comfortable under the plant, God sends a worm to eat it.

5. At this point, Jonah melts down and says he wishes he was dead.
6. Jonah, the prophet of God, really needed a lesson in mercy.

Baptism is about receiving mercy

1. Today I am going to baptize Xavier. I thought that this story was oddly fitting for baptism for two reasons. First, because it is important for the newly baptized, and for all of us, to understand that there is nowhere that we can go to hide from the presence of the Lord. Our disobedience may be done in the dark, but Christ brings it all to light. We all have to give an account.
2. But that leads to the second part of why this reading is fitting. God is a God of mercy. While Jonah didn't want to see his enemies receive mercy; our God wants to show mercy to *his* enemies. And baptism is the outward, visible sign of God having mercy on his enemies.
3. In baptism we see the sinner; the rebellious, disobedient enemy of God die with Christ in the cleansing water. What emerges is a new creation; one redeemed by Christ, raised with Christ, and inheriting the same kingdom as Christ.
4. God has so much better for us than we would have for ourselves. As Isaiah says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.'" (Isaiah 55:8-9)
5. Jonah would have let his enemies perish. Jonah would have faced God's wrath himself before seeing the Ninevites shown mercy. God's ways are higher and his thoughts and intentions so much better. God would see us transformed from armed rebels to adopted sons and daughters. God is about mercy and second chances.
6. So, yes, we cannot hide from God. We cannot flee from his presence. But we also should never feel like we have to. He wants us to come to him in humility and repentance where he can forgive us and welcome us home as his children.
 - a. As we celebrate baptism, that is exactly what we celebrate.