

Second Chances

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

January 22, 2012

He got on a boat going the _____ direction of Ninevah, a place called _____.

Why didn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh?

Jonah gets a _____ chance to respond to God's call.

He obeys God:

The Ninevites respond by:

God sees how the people _____, and God changes God's _____. Jonah is not the only one who gets a _____.

Sometimes God calls us to go places we _____ want to go, to do things that we _____ want to do, in order to:

Stories

John Wesley's journal, April 2, 1739, "At four in the afternoon I submitted to be more _____ and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining the city, to about _____ people."

The heart of this is that God _____ for people; God is always looking for ways to _____ people.

What is God calling you to do, that you have been resisting because...

Prayer Concerns:

Monday: Read Exodus 32:7-14

Several times in Scripture, God changes God's mind according to the prayers and responses of people. In this passage, Moses pleads with the LORD on behalf of the people. They have just committed a serious sin, creating and worshipping a golden statue while God and Moses are working on the details of their covenant relationship. God is angry and plans to punish them. But Moses, the God-appointed leader of the people, pleads with God on their behalf. As a result, God changes God's mind.

* What does this say about the importance of prayer? What does this say about the importance of our response to God, as in the case of the Ninevites?

* How do you think Moses felt about the people he was leading? Why would he plead with God on their behalf? If we read a little further, we see that when Moses encounters the people after this, he gets very angry. Why is he angry?

* What does this passage teach us about being a godly leader?

Tuesday: Read Matthew 18:23-35

One of Jonah's problems is that he is unable to extend God's mercy, forgiveness, and grace to others, especially to those who have hurt him or his people in the past. But God is clear in the story that God is merciful and God expects God's people to extend mercy to others. This parable is another example of this. One man is forgiven a huge debt, and instead of extending mercy to his friend who owes him a very small amount, he has the friend thrown into prison.

* Do you understand yourself to be a forgiven child of God? How has God extended mercy and grace to you?

* Is there anyone who you have been unable to forgive? A person, a family, a people group? How does this parable speak to our need to forgive even those who have genuinely hurt us or are in our debt?

Wednesday: Read Acts 9:1-19

Two men in this passage were called by God: Saul and Ananias. Saul is the more prominent of the two; he was a well-known persecutor of the early church, responsible for the death and imprisonment of many early Christians. Ananias was a faithful disciple of Jesus, who was praying and received the call from God to go and heal Saul.

* How did God call Saul? What did God have to do to get his attention? Have you ever had an experience like this, where you believe God did something extreme to get your attention?

* How do you think Ananias felt about going to heal Saul, a man who he knew was responsible for the imprisonment and death of many of Ananias' fellow Christians? What gave him the courage to obey God's call?

* Have you ever responded to God with "Here I am!" when you heard a call to do something you did not want to do? If so, what did God bring out of the situation? If not, how might you find the courage to respond to God's call?

Thursday: Read Mark 14:32-42

Even Jesus struggled when God called him to do something that he really didn't want to do. Did he want to save the world? Yes. Did he love the people? Yes. But at this moment, before he was arrested, tried, and crucified on a cross, when he was praying in the garden, anticipating the pain, humiliation, shame, and violence of what he knew was coming, he asked God if there wasn't another way? If it is possible, please find another way. In the end, he submits to God's call: "not what I want, but what you want."

* What does this whole passage teach us about Jesus? Do you think he understands our struggle to do God's will and make uncomfortable decisions to go where God wants us to go?

* What do you think gave Jesus the strength and courage to accept God's will, even when it wasn't what he wanted?

* Notice that the disciples sleep through this entire painful episode. Have you ever had the opportunity to accompany someone through a painful time in his or her life, but you turned away because you couldn't bear it? How might we be a more faithful community, and help one another bear our burdens and fulfill God's call?

Friday: Read Acts 10:1-48

It seems that those who know and follow God are continuously surprised by God's mercy, grace, and the new ways that God works in the world. In this story of the early church, Peter is surprised by God's new work among the Gentiles (non-Jews). Peter had always followed God's food rules about what was acceptable and unacceptable to eat. But now, God gave him a vision that he should not call profane anything that God had made clean. At this same time, Peter was summoned to go to the home of Cornelius, a Roman citizen, an officer of the Roman army. It was not acceptable for Jews to visit in the homes of Gentiles, but Peter perceived that God was doing a new thing. Sure enough, the Holy Spirit was poured out as Peter shared the good news about Jesus.

* Have you ever been surprised by God, by God working in a way that you didn't think possible or proper?

* How has God continued to change the expectations of God's people? What are some modern ways that we have learned that God is more inclusive than we have thought?

* How can we, the community of faith, remain open to the new things that God is doing? The new ways that God is working? The new things to which God is calling us?

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