



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

June 24, 2012

Pentecost 4

Sermon Text: [Jonah 3:1-10](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Jonah 3:1-10](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 115](#)

Second Lesson: [Colossians 1:3-8](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 4:26-34](#)

### **Proclaim God's Message**

A privilege we do not deserve  
A power we cannot fully anticipate

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I suppose eventually this will stop happening. Pretty soon we'll just text everyone or something else. We won't ever use the telephone or make a call again or leave a phone message for someone. But while you're still doing that, do you ever get kind of nervous? If you're leaving me a message, do you get nervous when one of my kids takes the message? Do you worry, "Is it ever going to get to him? Is it going to get to him right?" There are times I come home and one of the kids says "Someone called about something dad." "Thanks. I hope they call back." We are kind of that way at times, aren't we? We kind of screw up messages and not repeat them correctly.

I suppose that's better than if my doctor was calling me and he gave the message to one of my kids and said to double my medicine or whatever and the kid said "Hey dad, the doctor said you should stop taking your medicine" because they just think medicine is a bad thing. That would be a problem if they changed the message. Forgetting it is one thing, but changing it, making it their own, or not wanting or caring enough to take it, I guess that's where it gets to be a problem, right? It's a good thing doctor's don't leave messages like that. Think of how frustrating that would be.

I suppose that's kind of how God feels when he has a message that he wants us to speak or the message he wanted Jonah to speak. He said, "Go east young man. I have a message for you," and Jonah caught a slow boat going west, right? He didn't want to give the message. He didn't want that message to be heard because he was afraid the message would be listened to and believed. He didn't want that to happen.

We say "Isn't that terrible?" But think about how often you and I don't want to speak God's message, especially his message of the Law because that will just upset people and that will put up a wall between people if you tell them that what they are doing God says is wrong and they shouldn't do that. Have you ever heard that or thought that?

Humanly speaking it makes sense, but when we are talking about God's Word, we're not talking about things that are human, are we? We are talking about things that are

divine, things that are beyond us, things that are beyond our imagining, things that have a power. God's Word has a power that is way beyond my logic, your logic or any other human logic.

This morning we see just how essential it is that we proclaim God's message and trust its power. That's a privilege that you and I do not deserve, just like Jonah didn't deserve it. But let's also focus on how this is a power that we can't fully anticipate.

When you think of Jonah, I suppose the first thing you think of is Jonah got swallowed by a fish, right? Jonah became bait. That's probably what you remember of the story of Jonah. Do you realize that's only three verses in the whole book? The fish only makes an appearance in three verses out of the whole book and that's what we remember about it. Probably because it's so striking. But what I just read to you is no less striking... the miracle God worked converting an entire evil city. They turned away from their sin and turned to the Lord.

It's amazing that message ever got there. If there is anyone in Scripture where we see what an unwilling servant looks like, I suppose it's Jonah. God tells him to go east to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrians. Jonah says "No." He gets in a boat going the other direction. God shapes him up. God gets his attention. God shows him mercy. Jonah revels in that mercy when you read his prayer from the belly of the fish. It's amazing. At the same time, he can't say that he is a deserving servant of God. Just like you and like me, he's not. We really see that God works through servants that at times don't want to proclaim his message and are unwilling to proclaim his message, but he moves us to action and he does great things.

I can understand why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. Nineveh was the power of the day. The Assyrians were known for their cruelty. These were nasty people, violent people. If you read some of the stories I remember from history class, they make you shudder a little bit because of some of the things these guys used to do. These were not nice gentlemen. They ruled by intimidation and fear and torture.

So now God says to him, "You go to that city." He has to think he is going to be killed. Humanly speaking what else would he expect? "I'm going to go there and tell them that everything they are doing is wrong and God hates them and he is going to punish them because of it unless they turn away from it and turn back to God. They aren't going to listen to me. They are going to run me through." I understand that part of it.

I also understand it on another level. He was a prophet about 750 BC or so. Under his message, Jeroboam II had expanded the borders of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They went from a time when things were shrinking to a time when things were expanding and the people were kind of full of themselves. They turned to what they had always turned to... wickedness. Even though God blessed Jeroboam, he did evil in God's sight. We are told that during these times they were offering their sons and daughters as sacrifices in the fire. They weren't worshipping God as he had told them to worship. They were imitating their neighbors and they had turned away from God.

If you are a prophet at that time and you know that you're giving this message to God's people and they're not listening to you, you probably have connected the dots and can see "if God wants me to get Nineveh to turn away from their sin, it's probably because he is going to use Nineveh to come and destroy my people, my relatives, and take away the land in which I live." It's probably not much of a leap for him to understand that.

He doesn't think they are going to listen. He thinks they are going to get mad at him and kill him. If they do listen, it's going to hurt all of his blood relatives. And we know blood is thicker than other stuff, right? I understand why he went the other way. Humanly speaking there was absolutely no reason this should have worked. Who is going to listen to him?

That's what happens when we take our eyes off our God and who he is and what he has done and we put it on all the reasons why things won't work and why this can't happen and this won't happen, and "There's really no use in me sharing God's Word with **that** person because they'll never ever believe in God. They've mocked God. They've laughed at God. They think Christians are a bunch of backwards superstitious fools. Now you want me to just go and face that ridicule and share with them God's message of Law, that we all deserve hell, and then God's message of Gospel, that some carpenter 2,000 years ago died on a cross and lived perfectly in our place and that means we are forgiven? They are going to laugh at me! You want me to go talk to the person that is caught up in a sin? That person is blood to me. If I tell them they are sinning, they are going to be mad at me. I'm going to lose that relationship. I'm going to lose that friend. I'm going to have a relative upset with me. You want me to tell them what they're doing is sin? That's someone else's job. That isn't mine. Besides, they won't listen anyhow. It will just create a problem."

We can come up with every excuse in the book, just like Jonah did. We don't deserve this privilege to go and share God's Word with ourselves let alone to anyone else. We are sinners who don't trust God, who don't believe God. We trust our own evaluation and our own wisdom all too often. Yet God says "You are my witnesses. I have no other plan. You are the messenger. I am relying on you to bring the message of salvation to people that need to hear it. That person that has strayed... I am relying on you to find them. That person that has rejected me all of their life... I am relying on you to reach out to them." This is the privilege he gives to us. We don't deserve it. We don't trust it. We don't do any of these things. The only thing that makes us worthy of it is the blood of Jesus Christ. He lived in our place. He died in our place. We are covered in his righteousness at our baptism. He gives us his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins for all the times we have made the excuses on why it's someone else's job. He comes and says "I still love you and I still forgive you."

In that forgiveness we find the power and we find an ability that does not reside in us, it comes from outside of us, to trust what God says. He says his message is powerful. His Word is living and active. It's sharper than any double-edged sword and able to divide soul and spirit. Trust the power of God's message. Don't trust how well you

present it. Don't trust how smooth a talker you are. Just trust the message. Speak the message in love and kindness and gentleness, and God can do amazing things. People might still reject it. That's alright. But there will be those that will listen. God's Spirit will work through people like you and like me and like he did through Jonah.

We are told that to get through the City of Nineveh, it was a three day's journey. I think that means it took three days to walk all through it and get your message out. The first day into it, his message goes viral, right? Even without YouTube. They are telling each other "Here's this message that has come. This guy from podunk Israel has told us his God is not happy with us." I have to believe that Jonah said more than in 40 more days, which would be Gospel, that Nineveh will be destroyed, which would be Law. I have to think if Jonah was assigned to the Ninevehites, that means he told them about what happened with that fish and how he tried not to come and speak this message, and God made him bait. Then God made him regurgitated bait. I think he had to share that message about God's mercy and God's love towards Jonah in spite of Jonah telling God, "No. Don't want to do it. Not going to do it."

Whatever reason it was, the message God gave him to speak, when he spoke it faithfully, it spread like wildfire. The people, even before the king's decree, started putting on sackcloth. The thing I find interesting is the king puts on sackcloth and sits in dust and declares a fast for the people **and** for their animals. Think about that. The animals had to fast. Think of how annoying all that animal noise would have been. They are all saying "Hey! Feed me, would you?" That would have been a reminder. Every bellow, every animal noise they would hear would be a reminder of their repentance and their sin against God. That's something, isn't it?

This is an amazing miracle. This is more amazing than Jonah and the fish. A pagan city repents. So who are you and I to say God's Word will not touch someone else's heart? Why is it that we think we are smarter than God? We are called to share God's Word faithfully. We are called to share it in love, not be annoying as we share it, but share it naturally. Share the love of Christ with our actions and with our words and let others see that we who have been loved by Christ are changed to be more loving even when we don't think it's going to matter or it's going to work. We are to be loving and we are to share the love of Christ because we want that other person to know the joy of forgiveness, the joy of knowing that even though we have sinned against our God and deserve hell, he has given us heaven.

Trust that message and just proclaim it. God does the work. You don't have to. But if you don't speak the message, if the message is tucked away in the corner and kept like some keepsake that you keep for yourself to look at every now and then, if you don't live it and you don't share it, God can't work through it. That's why he calls you to proclaim his message. You don't deserve it. You can't improve on it. But you can proclaim it and trust its incredible power. And then find joy that God has forgiven you so that you can do it. Amen.