



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

June 30, 2013

Pentecost 6

Sermon Text: [Jonah 3:3-4:4](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 62](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 11:21b-30](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 9:51-62](#)

### **The Believer Follows Christ Follows of Christ Understand the Call for Total Commitment**

Total obedience to God's command

Total submission to God's will

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Does anybody here like going to buffets? I see two honest people. What do you like about buffets? Why do you like going to them? They're yummy? Okay, they're yummy. That's a good reason to like them. Besides the American ideal of being able to gorge yourself, there are other things we probably like about buffets. You can try things without having to get a whole heaping plateful. Although you probably take a whole heaping plateful and find out you don't like it, right? You can try different things, find what you like, eat what you like and then leave behind what you don't like, right? You go to Golden Corral, you go to Chinese Buffet, and you can find out whether that funny spelled General Tsao's chicken or however you say it is good or if you are just going to stick with sweet and sour chicken because you know what that is all about. You can try different things. We like that. We find out what we like and we keep going back to what we like. And what we don't like, we avoid. Buffet...that's kind of the whole point, right? You can pick and choose.

Now when it comes to eating, that's great. That's wonderful. Knock yourself out. If you are going to go to a buffet today, go and knock yourself out. That's great. But when it comes to your walk with God, don't take the buffet approach. That's kind of what Jonah did, didn't he? He took the buffet approach. God's love for the Israelites? I want more of that. Put some more of that on my plate God. God's love for Assyrians? Take that out of here. Get that put away. I don't want to see that again. That didn't work so well for Jonah.

Jonah is a story we are familiar with, but when you think about it and how God tells us he wants total commitment from us, what we learn is that means total obedience to his commands. That means total submission to his will. And what we learn from Jonah is that Jonah wasn't quite totally committed.

It's fascinating to think about Jonah and his life. The first words I read to you were "Jonah obeyed the LORD. He went to Nineveh." But when he got to the last paragraph, we found out that isn't how it started. Jonah did not start with obedience. Jonah started with disobedience.

Jonah was a prophet of the Lord. God came to him and said, "I want you to go to Nineveh. I want you to proclaim a message of repentance to the Ninevites." Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. Assyria was to the north and to the east of Israel. It was a growing power at the time of Jonah. It would become THE world power that would rival the Egyptians who were to the south and to the west. When the two world powers wanted to get together to see who was more powerful, they often would meet in Israel. The land would be ravaged by war. So when God says to Jonah, "Go to the Assyrians, go to Nineveh and proclaim 40 more days and Nineveh will be destroyed," Jonah wasn't thrilled. God said, "Go east young man." Jonah said, "Not a chance." He hopped the first ship going west to Tarshish. It's a funny sounding word. If you think modern day Spain, that's where he went. He got in the boat and went in the opposite direction as far away as he could, as fast as he could.

You know how that worked out for him. God said, "No, you are going to catch the first fish back to shore," right? And that's what God did. That couldn't have been a pleasant experience for Jonah. It had to be a little bit humbling to be swallowed by a fish, vomited up on the dry ground and then have God say, "Go to Nineveh, Jonah." Then Jonah went. He went and proclaimed the message God gave him.

It's a large city. It takes three days to go through it. He probably needs to go through it to proclaim this message. The first day he starts going, "40 more days and Nineveh will be destroyed." It sounds like a message that's all Law, doesn't it? Destruction. But did you notice how the Ninevites didn't hear just Law? The king heard a Gospel message in there. He heard something that led him to say, "Here is what we are all going to do, even your animals. You are going to put on sackcloth." It's not exactly satin. It's not exactly silk. It's not exactly smooth. It's not exactly comfortable. "You are going to put it on your animals too. So you are going to say to God, 'We're terribly sorry.' And you are going to say, 'Even our animals have offended you, Lord. Now we are going to put up with their bellowing because they have sackcloth on them because that's how sorry we are.'" That happened the first day. He didn't even get all the way through his presentation.

We talked about this a little bit in Bible Class this morning, how we've been doing this so long, we can't change. This kind of tells you that God can change anyone. God changed the Assyrians. The Assyrians were not nice people. The Assyrians...this is the one thing I remember from my freshman history class in college...it's the only thing I remember. It was about the Assyrians and how they put people to death. They put people to death by giving them a ride on a slide. That doesn't sound so bad, does it? They put them on a slide. It's not a slide like we have over there where you slide down and go "Wee" and then jump off and run up it again. This one you only went down once. This slide wasn't flat and you sat on it and went down. This slide was sharp at one point. They would put you up at the top and let you go and you'd come down on both sides and that was the end of you. They'd do it in public because they wanted everyone to know they were mean and nasty and you better listen to what they say.

So when God tells Jonah to go to those people, Jonah doesn't want to go because he's probably heard what they are like and he doesn't want that. Can you think of what that was like for Jonah to go and be among those people and have to go say, "God is going to destroy you. You're all terrible." Can you imagine what your knees would feel like as you are speaking that message to those people? You guys probably can't relate to it. I can relate to it a little bit, being a Lions fan so close to the gates of hell at Lambeau. This is kind of what it was like to him, only more, right? Think about how tough that would be. That's what he did.

Then you think he would have his iPod out playing Katrina & The Waves "Walking on Sunshine" because they repented. This would be the coolest thing ever. I can't keep you awake for 15-20 minutes on a Sunday, and he goes one day and they all repent. This had to be the greatest thing ever for a spokesman of God to have that happen, right? You would think he was just walking on air. But he wasn't, was he?

He goes and holds his breath and pouts. "God, this is why I wanted to go west, not east, because I know you are compassionate and gracious and abounding in love and that you wouldn't destroy these people because they would turn from their sin and you, being so loving, would forgive them." How weird is that? He's a prophet. He's a spokesman for God. He knows what God is like, obviously. He doesn't like it.

Buffet, buffet of faith, right? God, your love for the Israelites? Wonderful. God, your love for the Assyrians? Terrible. How could a prophet ever do something like that? How could he be so arrogant and so self-centered? How could he be so unloving?

We'd never do that, would we? I mean, when our community looks at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church, they know how loving we are to the community, don't they? They see all the things we do to reach out in love to our community, don't they? All the things we do to meet physical needs and spiritual needs? Or do they look at us and see people who love each other and love those within the four walls?

When we stop and think about that a little bit, we are kind of rubbing shoulders with Jonah at times, aren't we? When it comes to God's love for me, I love it. I absolutely love it. I want it. I know I need it. I know my sins better than any of you know my sins, and I love and rejoice in the fact that my God loved me so much that he sent Jesus to take away my sins. If each and every one of us here was given a multiple choice question...Christians love themselves, other Christians, all people...we'd mark all people, everyone of us here, wouldn't we? We know that, but would those outside of us looking at us give the same answer?

Maybe we don't do it consciously, but I think certainly you could make the case that by our actions, we give a different answer than our lips give. We have opportunities to show love for those around us, both for their physical needs and their spiritual needs. We have the love of God that lives in our hearts. We have the reason to do it because God first loves us and because we love God and we want to serve him. The question

is, do we at times practice buffet Christianity and say, "I want God's love for us. I'm not so sure I want it for others." I don't think we'd ever say it, but again, do our actions say it?

Total commitment to God means loving like God loves. It means obeying the things God wants us to do. First of all for ourselves. Total commitment for God isn't viewing coming to church as doing a favor for God. It's recognizing that God is doing something for us. He's reminding us of his love and his forgiveness. Living for God isn't just doing something because if we don't do it, someone else won't. It's because it's our response to who God is and what he has done for us. We want to love, not only our fellow believers, but all people in whatever ways we are able to. But because each of us, like Jonah, has that sinful nature, we are going to fail.

We are going to fail at this. What is really easy for us to do and what Satan will want us to do is to look at each other and recognize how you have failed, and you have failed, and you have failed (I hope I didn't point at anyone specifically) and not think about how I, myself, have failed, right? This is what God wants us to do...see how we individually can love better, how we can carry out this total commitment to God, total submission to his will, total obedience to his commands. And how we, when we fail, don't point fingers and blame and say, "Someone else hasn't done it either." Or "They haven't done it." But just say, "I haven't done it." Then we say, "Lord, for the sake of Jesus, forgive me."

We know that Jesus came and took our place and was perfect in our place. When we were baptized into Christ, we were clothed with his righteousness, so that perfection became ours. Now when God looks at us and we say, "Lord, for the sake of Jesus, forgive me," he doesn't see the times when we have failed to love or submit to God's will. He sees Jesus' perfection. He says to us, "You are my own. I have bought you. I am not going to give you the punishment your sins deserve."

That's what leads us to want to do what he wants us to do, to be more committed to each and every passing day, week, month and year to growing in our love for God, which leads then to growing in our living for God, being committed to him. That's why things like these One Another studies we are doing are so beneficial.

This morning at the end of class I asked, "Name me five people in our congregation that would not have benefitted from this class." Guess how many names I got? We all could grow in our ability to do these things better. That's why God puts us together in families that look like a congregation, so that we encourage one another to be faithfully committed to God, faithfully submitting to his will, faithfully obeying what he says, not because we have to, not because otherwise we are going to feel bad or deal with guilt. We do it because he loved us first and took away all our guilt. You and I always need reminders of that truth or we'll morph into something different, something other. Satan will convince us what we do earns God's love. Or Satan will convince us that we do more so that we don't have to be totally committed because we are a little more committed than someone else. We don't want to look at that. We want to look at

God's love for us in Christ. That moves us to want to be more than what Jonah was, or to want to be more than what we have been. It moves us to want to be more like Christ. Amen.