

WELCOME 21st July 2019 – 6 Pentecost '19 C

Jonah

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! Special welcome to our visitors/guests! 1st communion families & friends! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship.

I reckon you could be living under a rock & still I bet you've heard someone say, "God loves..." or "Jesus loves you." And if you're at all like me, you've wondered, "Yeah...well what about him?" or "Really? Her?" or "Even them?" We've all wondered about the boundaries or limits of God's love...God's capacity to genuinely care for ...act compassionately toward...love...well...folks who appear to us as really awful

The Austin Lounge Lizards...yes they're Texas band actually wrote a cute little song titled "Jesus loves me but he can't stand you" which gave voice to that very idea that there must be some limit...some end point...some people who are outside the range of God's love...

Today as we continue asking major questions from the minor prophets, Jonah confronts God's love in a way he can't understand & Jonah in his own way asks that very question: **DOES GOD REALLY LOVE EVERYONE?**

We'll explore & experience that today...and at the same time 4 of our young people will experience that love of God as we know it in Jesus in a unique & special way... It will be their 1st experience of the sacrament of Holy Communion...and we all get to be here to share that with them...Which is just the coolest...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, whether we believe it or not...whether it's the center of our existence or an idea that seems just too crazy to be true...you love us and you seek to draw our lives deeper into your love every day. Let today be that day when your love is made real for us & powerful in us simply through the work of Jesus Christ who gave himself so we could know your love & live in your presence forever....In His Name we pray...Amen!

6 PENTECOST '19 C – MAJOR QUESTIONS FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: DOES GOD REALLY LOVE EVERYONE?

FAITH CHAT

1. It's a tough job but **YOU** have to do it. Share a time when that was you.
2. Are there people you really struggle to get along with, see anything good in...?

Jonah & the Whale...even if you've never spent a lot of time in church or read a Bible somehow you know that story...at least heard of it. I'd bet most of our young people could tell at least this part of the narrative (Jonah page 1)

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. Assyria was **THE** superpower of the Ancient Near East ^{b/t} 850-600 years ^{b/4} the birth of Jesus. They conquered the nation of Israel where Jonah lived in 722BC...They were a bloodthirsty violent terrorizing nation.

So when God says to Jonah, *I'm sending you to them to tell them I've had enough* Jonah balks at the very idea. It's odd really...not that Jonah didn't want to do what God asked...but that God asked AT ALL. That God would warn the Assyrians he was giving them a chance to live differently...to live responsively to Him or face utter destruction. Imagine...tipping off the bad guys before they get their just desserts! It was simply unthinkable to Jonah. So Jonah did the only thing he could think to do: Tarshish. About as far in the opposite direction as he could go.

But his plans obviously didn't coincide with God's plans...So not only is God giving the Assyrians a 2nd chance...Jonah gets one too. (Jonah page 2) Now...I don't know about you, but if I ask my kids to do something...issue a warning...give a directive... make it clear there's an outcome it would behoove them to accomplish and they do it... I'll be pretty excited. I'm going to feel pretty happy. It happens so rarely I might just buy ice cream...Imagine...you say it **once** & it happens. I might need a defibrillator.

But Jonah...(Jonah page 3) In the annals of "What no preacher does ever" Jonah fires off a one-sentence-sermon, the whole city responds favourably, & he gets mad. Jonah gets cranky that the whole city from the throne room to the barnyard busts out in repentance, sackcloth & ashes...imagine your cows mooing in repentance. *Perhaps even yet God will change his mind & hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.*

Jonah can't stand it. He can't abide folks he doesn't want to be spared being spared Jonah has his list of "God I would like you to smite..." w/ Assyrians at the top of the list & God won't smite. Jonah is hoping against hope that God will bring down fire on the Ninevites...just nuke them into burnished glass & God takes his finger off the trigger...before there is even a tiny smackdown there is no smackdown.

Now here's a funny thing...happens only to preachers...I knew today we'd have lots of guests & special visitors here...Lots of our younger saints & siblings...and I thought, "Wouldn't it be great to have a video that tells the Jonah story? Who wants to listen to 4 chapters sitting in these hard plastic chairs? Let's get a short video that tells the Jonah story in a fun & visual way." That's what I thought...So I loaded up that enormous treasure trove of theological wisdom YouTube...among the fail videos & fishing videos & things blowing up videos...there's 100s of Jonah & the Whale videos.

Now I didn't preview all of them but the vast majority of them finished the story right about the time the cows went into full-on mooing repentance. Jonah sitting under a dead bush honked off at God because God changed his mind about nuking Nineveh off the planet...doesn't get a mention. According to YouTube & all the nice folks who put all those cool videos there, the Jonah & the Whale account is a morality tale like Aesop's Fables & the moral is 2-fold: 1. Do what God asks the first time. 2. Get your act together or God's gonna unleash some serious punishment on your wicked self.

But here's the problem...NOWHERE is **THAT** the message of the Bible Even Jonah knows better: *I knew you are a merciful & compassionate God, slow to get angry & filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people.*

We've all wondered about the boundaries or limits of God's love...God's capacity to genuinely care for...act compassionately toward...love...folks who appear to us as really awful...& for Jonah the Ninevites fit the bill. They are beyond the pale awful & God can't really love them...Can he? Not really. He can't love **THOSE** people like he loves **MY** peeps...Can he? Them? Even them? Even Rugby got tangled up in a question like that...for goodness sakes!

Jonah seems enamoured with the thought of these people facing the judgment of God. He gets himself up to a ringside box seat so he can watch the destruction & fist-pump to the sound of screaming & explosions. The whole reason Jonah seems to run from God is that he knows God genuinely wants the Ninevites to come to him. Jonah's got his knickers in a massive knot because he is confronted with the magnitude of God's love for every living thing on this planet...Jonah is absolutely gobsmacked to discover: There is no one God does not love

The Father sees unsurpassable worth in each of us. There is no one about whom God thinks, "Ummm...nah not you." There is not one of us the Father sees as disposable dispensable discardable forgettable...God hangs the question out

there for Jonah & for us: Should I not care for such a great city? Should my heart not long for them? Should I not feel the loss of each one living distant from me?

Should I somehow not care when they live & die apart from my love? Not the city as a city but the city as 120K human lives...distant from God's embrace...& all those cows!

You, in God's eyes, are worth everything...including the life of His Son...

This is how much God loved the world: He gave his one & only Son as a gift. So now everyone who believes in him will never perish but experience everlasting life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge & condemn the world, but to be its Savior & rescue it! – Jn 3:16-17

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. – Rom 3:23-25

But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. – Gal 4:4-5

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. 1 Pet 3:18

There is one God & one Mediator who can reconcile God & humanity—the man Christ Jesus. He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. – 1 Tim 2:5-6

For the law never made anything perfect. But now we have confidence in a better hope, through which we draw near to God. – Heb 7:19

Jesus himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world. - 1 Jn 2:2

DOES GOD REALLY LOVE EVERYONE?

Yep...even you...in spite of everything...I don't know if you think that's the best news ever or the most ridiculous thing a human ever said...but it's the truth.

God crazy loves you. Does not for an eye-blink think you are anything less than worth dying for. Went to hell & back so you don't have to.

And then left you an on-going reminder of the greatness the overwhelming magnitude of that love...bread & wine & the promise that nothing you have done or can do will snatch you away from his love...that death is undone, hell overthrown & every sin & separation forgiven...now & forever.

Let's pray with that in mind...**Gracious Father, we know you are merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. Help us trust that more each day and live that wondrous love in all we do. Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.**