

Jonah 4

January 19th, 2020

“Choose Life”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Sanctity of Life Sunday

Vicar Miguel Gonzalez-Feliciano

Grace, Mercy, and Peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Awkward End]

The book of Jonah has always been a book that I found interesting. While the VeggieTale’s movie might have had some catchy songs, the book has a much darker tone. From start to finish, the book is all about the failing of a man named Jonah. He is a prophet of God whose main responsibility is to speak to the people the messages from the Lord. However, when he is told that he must go to Nineveh, Jonah abandons his post and flees. It takes a large fish swallowing him whole to bring Jonah back to his task.

For most people, the retelling of the story stops there. Though an incredibly popular story, known even by non-Christians, most people don’t think to much about the end of the story. At the end of Jonah, the prophet sits in the shade and waits to see God judge the city. But God doesn’t destroy Nineveh, God has mercy. This mercy causes Jonah to get angry, so angry he could just die. Jonah questions God and the book ends with God’s question,

**“...And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city,
in which there are more than 120,00
persons who do not know their right hand from their left,
and also much cattle?”**

There is no answer to God’s question from Jonah. No missing chapter. God wants to know, should He not choose life?

[Angry Enough to Die]

You see, Jonah wasn't just refusing to go to Nineveh because he was afraid. Sure, that was part of the reason, but Jonah makes it clear in the final chapter. Jonah doesn't want to go to Nineveh because he knew that God would have mercy on the people of Nineveh. In his anger, he says,

“That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster...take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

Jonah was sitting in the shade of a plant God had raised up to provide him shade, specifically because he wanted to preserve the life of His unfaithful servant. God is a God who is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love who relents from disaster. He chooses life for His people. This prophet has experienced this time and time again, surviving the storm of the ship, surviving for three days in the belly of the large fish, and surviving his trip into Nineveh. But Jonah doesn't value the life that has been given to him. Kept safe and guarded, speaking on behalf of the one true God of Israel, the prophet weeps over the death of the plant and the life given to Nineveh that he says it is better to die than to live.

The gift of life, given by God, is treated so carelessly by the one who is meant to bring the words of life to the people.

[Sitting Under the Shade]

You and I also tend to sit under the shade. Our shade takes many forms: the comfort of a secure job, the joy of a happy marriage, the Hawkeyes being successful, or the security of faith, knowing that you're saved. Sitting under the shade isn't always a bad thing, after all, God provided that shade. We may not be like Jonah, who was sitting outside the city walls judging Nineveh and waiting to see what God would do, but you and I are closer to that than we ought to be.

Instead of sitting under a plant, you and I sit in comfy chairs watching the news seeing the sin that is seemingly running rampant in the world around us. You might shake your head at the way our poor are mistreated in society, the normalization of euthanasia, murdering the sick and elderly, or the number of babies that are killed yearly before you change the channel. Seeing misfortune and sin, it can be easy as a baptized child of God to just wait and see what God will do with this sinful world. You and I know that there are ways to be active in the world. There are ministry opportunities, mission groups, life organizations, or even simple conversations with strangers and coworkers, families and church members.

But these take us out of the shade.

I was convicted of this as I prepared this sermon for Sanctity of Life Sunday. The temptation is there to sit back and enjoy the shade. When it comes to talking about the number of children killed in abortion, or the very practice of abortion, it is so much easier for me to sit under the shade. I'm sure you might feel the same way. Maybe you know that it's a sin, but it's awkward to discuss, so you leave it to others. Perhaps you feel as if it's already been decided by society and so you've given up speaking the truth in love. You might feel like there is nothing wrong with abortion.

No matter the reason, if you and I remain silent the result is the same. Babies die. The gift of life, given by God, is treated so carelessly by people who are meant to bring the words of life.

[Hopeful Enough to Live]

So, the question God asked Jonah still stands for you and me. Because this isn't about what you or I want, it isn't about what society has voted on, or what we can reason, it's about the will of God. And our God is not a God of death or silence. You and I have a God of life. A God who is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love and He asked Jonah, should He not choose life? Because God did choose life.

He chose life for you and me, sinful people who would have chosen sin and death. Jesus came down from heaven, and he died so that you and I might have the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and life everlasting. This is the hope you have. The words that should fill your mouth, the greatest joy this life has to offer, thanks be to God for Jesus who has given us eternal life.

[*Certain Ending*]

To this day, I can't help but be puzzled by the ending of Jonah. How a prophet could have missed out so much on the gift of life God had given? God asks a question, and it isn't even answered. We are left hanging onto His words.

Many commentators state that this is a common rhetorical move. By leaving the end of the book on a cliffhanger, with a question, the author is posing the question to the reader. You and I are meant to sit there at the end of Jonah and ponder that question from God.

I pray that you and I can stand before God one day and give a sure testimony that the Gospel was spoken. Because while Jonah may have an uncertain end, this world certainly doesn't. Christ promised to come back one day, to judge the living and the dead and establish a kingdom that will have no end. At that time, you and I can sit in the shade. Surrounded by all the children of God, those who perished in the womb, those who died in old age, and those who were taken on the last day. Should God not choose life? Thanks be to God that He has given life to you and me.

Choose life.

So Be it.

Amen.

As followers of Christ, "Keep loving one another earnestly
And show hospitality to one another without grumbling." AMEN! (1Pt 4:8-9)
