

Jonah

November 8 2020

The story of Jonah is a fascinating read and an insight into his personality and inner struggles. However, this story may also be more of a commentary on the psyche of the Hebrews at this time in history. There are many questions that arise out of this mornings reading. The most obvious one is what is Jonah being called to by God? The other important question is Who is my neighbor and do I need to love my enemies?

My mind races to the story told by Our Lord of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:29:36. In the Good Samaritan story it is the perceived villain who is actually the merciful hero. In the story of Jonah it is the victim who is called by God to help their mortal enemy. Both the Good Samaritan and Jonah are called to participate and understand God's divine love. This is not easy for us to do and that is why Jonah struggles so much.

Our Lord said that it is very easy to love those who love you. One's faith gets tested and stretched when we are called to love those who hate us and wants us dead. This is Jonah's dilemma. He is being called by God to a people who hates Hebrews and wants them dead.

Some back story might be helpful. In Jonah 1:2 we are told that Nineveh was very proud of its killing of the Hebrews. That is attested to

in the monuments left behind by the Assyrians. At the British Museum in London you can see a spectacular wall relief showing Assyrian sieges. The famous siege of Lachish shows multiple images of Hebrews being impaled and stacks of Hebrew heads. It seems that the Assyrian scribes paid their soldiers for each Hebrew head they decapitated. To a Jew this was very sinful and disrespectful to a human body. The archeologists discovered this gruesome relief in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh. The psychological warfare of collecting Hebrew heads in battle certainly had a great effect on the Hebrew population in Judea. This information helps to understand and justify Jonah's apprehension.

Let's look at this story with a little allegory. What if Jonah was to represent the Hebrew nation of Judea. The question arises, what are they being called to as a nation? Is their God calling them to love their most feared and hated enemy? The reason I raised this concept of Jonah representing the Hebrew nation arises out of 1:9. In this verse Jonah identifies himself with an ethnic marker. I am a Hebrew. A huge act of self identification. The use of this designation is very rare in the Old Testament. Abraham was the first to use it and later Joseph. Only three times is it used. This designation is important when we consider God's call to send a Hebrew to the Ninevites.

Back to the question, what is Jonah and the Hebrews being called to by their God? Especially being called to Nineveh. Well they are both being called to love their enemies. It is first to be found in 2 Sam 19:6 and later in Mathew 5:44 and Luke 6:27. Mathew and Luke are almost identical. Mt 5:44, " But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you". Jonah and the Hebrew nation are being called to make amends, put your fear and hate aside and love

your enemies. They both are being called to participate in a higher form of love. To a human experience of how God loves all. That is an incredible challenge to one's faith. Yet during his whole struggle God is with Jonah at each step. No matter how far he tries to run away. Being able to develop this type of Divine Godlike love is not easy. It is truly a grace given by God. It goes beyond our normal emotions and requires a lot of struggle and prayer. In the end Jonah realizes that people are people and the Assyrians have similarities with the Hebrews. There are so many lessons to be drawn from this book. It is a lot deeper than the water that the whale swims in. A story of personal and national growth to love one's enemies and to understand love in a new way.

God Bless and stay health and safe, Pastor D