



Theology Tuesday for Sunday, January 17, 2021

Scripture: Jonah 1: 1-17

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

For the next few weeks, we are going to spend time with one of the more well-known of the Twelve minor Prophets, Jonah. Most of us are familiar with his story, or at least we know that he was swallowed by a big fish. (Side note: Never says he was swallowed by a whale. Simply says he was swallowed by a big fish).

We first hear about Jonah in 2 kings 14: 25:

"He re-established Israel's border from Lebo-hamath to the Dead Sea. This was in agreement with the word that the Lord, the God of Israel, spoke through his servant the prophet Jonah, Amittai's son, who was from Gath-hepher"

Some scholars assume that this is one and the same but we don't really know. Interestingly enough, in the Book of Jonah, our main character is never called a prophet. Also, unlike other books associated with prophets, this book is more narrative than oracle. And one last difference, there is no subscription, telling us of a date, a time, or a king. For example, the Book of Isaiah starts out

by saying..."The vision about Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah, Amoz's son, saw in the days of Judah's kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah." As readers, we can place and date Isaiah's ministry by the Kings and nation.

The book of Jonah simply starts out by saying..."The Lord's word came to Jonah, Amittai's son:" It does not fall into any particular historical setting. It is a story for all time, for all places, for all people.

Ultimately the story of Jonah is about our call as people of faith and how this call shapes us. Last week, we learned we were named and claimed through our baptism as God's Beloved. And this week, through the story of Jonah, we learn that this means something for our lives, for our words, and for our actions. This call to become the people God created and calls us to be is uncompromising, something Jonah learns in the belly of that fish.

At the beginning of our story, Jonah is told to go to Nineveh and to speak out against the wrong doings there. Jonah doesn't just *not* go to Nineveh. He goes completely in the opposite direction to Tarshish. (Think of Nineveh as Washington, DC and Tarshish as San Francisco, and Jonah is standing on Main street in Midway when he receives the word from the Lord to go).

By hopping on that boat, Jonah is trying to escape this unwanted call to speak out against the wrong doings happening in Nineveh. Again, unlike other prophets, we aren't told exactly why Jonah doesn't want to do this. For example, Moses doesn't want to speak to Pharaoh because he is not the best speaker. Elijah doesn't want to become a prophet because he fears for his life. We are just told Jonah runs in the opposite direction.

However, if we know a little bit of Israelite history, we know that Nineveh was part of Assyria which destroyed Israel and as one commentator put it, no one wants to go into the land of those who destroyed your homeland. Maybe this was the reason Jonah didn't want to go, or maybe there is something else, you know, something like Jonah's "quarrel with the compassionate nature of God" but I'm getting ahead of myself.

At this point in the story, all we know is that someone doesn't want to follow his call. We see the beginnings of a man's faith journey and how his reluctance to trust and obey affects him and others around him.

Question for the week: Has there ever been a time you were reluctant to follow God's direction for your life? (Let me reassure you, I fully admit that my answer to this question is yes).