

Daily Devotional, September 15, 2021 (Self-) Righteous Indignation

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." Jonah 4:1-3 (NIV)

Jonah's is one of the best known stories in the Bible. Jonah is also so much like us on our worst days. He's self-centered, immature, and also honest with God. This is a short story...about a 10-minute read. In case you haven't read it in a while, the story goes like this...

God sent Jonah to a big city called Nineveh because God had seen how wicked the people there had become. But Jonah immediately went in the opposite direction and boarded a ship headed to Tarshish. So, God stirred up a big storm to destroy the ship. All of the sailors knew Jonah was running from his God, so they threw him in the sea to appease God's anger and save the rest of those onboard. Next a big fish comes along and swallows Jonah. At this point, Jonah prays a remorseful yet sincere prayer to God and as a result, the big fish spits him out. God then tells Jonah to go to Nineveh a second time, and this time Jonah goes. He walks around this big, wicked city for 40 days, crying out that they are about to be overthrown! Everyone, from the most meager on up to the king himself believed Jonah, repented, and turned from their evil ways, hoping that God might change God's mind. And that's exactly what happened. God had compassion and did not bring calamity upon Nineveh.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah. So he pouted. He prayed angrily to God and said that this is exactly why he did NOT want to go to Nineveh. Because, "I knew you were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." And he plopped down in a huff in the sun. God made a plant grow over him for shade, which made Jonah happy. But then a worm ate the plant, which made Jonah mad. God said, "You are mad over the fate of one bush. Shouldn't I be concerned over Nineveh, where over 120,000 people live who don't know their right hand from their left, plus many animals?"

Jonah knew he was right about those wicked Ninevites. They deserved all they were about to get from God, but Jonah was also right about God, and God came through. God's grace, mercy, forgiving nature, and abounding steadfast love can really be an affront to our sense of righteous indignation.

We are told over and over again to love our neighbors and to pray for our enemies, but do you ever feel like Jonah? Maybe you don't want to pray for whoever you have decided is wicked because you know God is compassionate, gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in love. If you were to say that prayer, you expect God just might come through and then that person's wicked behavior might never receive the punishment you have deemed appropriate.

Jonah teaches us that God always sees us (and every other person) with compassion, grace, mercy, forgiveness and with abounding love. We can never change that, thanks be to God!

Prayer: God, You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. For all of this, we give You thanks. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.