

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 21, 2024

*“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way,
God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them,
and he did not do it.”*

– Jonah 3:10 –

The Ninevites were enemies to the Jews and the two nations warred bitterly. In Jonah’s mind, the acts against God’s people were unforgivable, but God never sees sin that way. He is the God of the second chance, forgiving those who turn to Him in repentance. He did not desire destruction of the Ninevites; He desired their hearts. So, He called and sent Jonah to preach the truth of God’s love to his enemies. Jonah knew God was merciful and kind, giving second chances even when it seems undeserved, but Jonah did not want to go; instead he ran in the other direction. He faced a storm, was swallowed by a great fish, prayed in thanksgiving for God’s salvation, and was spit up three days later to act in obedience to God.

How often do we feel like Jonah, called to preach the Gospel to people we do not think deserve His grace? We would rather not take God’s salvation to our enemies. But we are reminded that God knows the hearts of our enemies better than we do; though we do not think they deserve His grace, He desires their praise, too. God does give second chances, even to prophets who run from His work. Grace is the unmerited favor of God; He relents for those who repent. He was so willing to save the Ninevites that He sent someone to share his grace with them. How could they turn to God if they did not hear His Word?

We can find comfort in the story of Jonah because we all have moments when we would rather run from God’s calling and go our own way. Christ did not just come for us; He came for all people. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus was born to shine the Light in the darkness, to pay the debt so that all people might have a second chance. Like He did for the Ninevites, our loving Father chooses to relent for those who repent. How can people repent if they have not heard the promise of God that was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ? He has called us to be like Jonah, to take His grace to our friends as well as our enemies and to share God’s promises with those who might not seem to deserve a second chance.

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