

Jonah 3-4

3 The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. ⁹Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.’

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

4 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. ³And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.’ ⁴And the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’ ⁵Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

6 The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’

9 But God said to Jonah, ‘Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?’ And he said, ‘Yes, angry enough to die.’ ¹⁰Then the Lord said, ‘You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and

twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?’

REFLECT & DISCUSS

Context

The book of Jonah defies categories. It doesn't fit neatly into any genre of literature. And Jonah is unlike any other prophet: instead of preaching to a stubborn people, he is stubborn. Instead of talking back at God to resist his call, Jonah runs away from God (well, tries to...). In this short and timely tale, we glimpse the relentlessness of God bent on a mercy that Jonah cannot stomach, even as it stomachs him.

Big Idea

Mercy is a madness bitterness can't take.

Quote

“Bitterness is unforgiveness fermented.”

- Gregory Popcak

“I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world.”

- Mahatma Ghandi

Reflect

1. Read the scripture passage carefully and slowly. What word or image stands out to you? Why?
2. Why is Jonah upset with Nineveh's repentance and God relenting from punishment?
3. Has anger ever given you fits like it did Jonah? What have you learned about anger?
4. The story ends unresolved. A question looms for Jonah (and us) to answer. How would you write the ending?