

In September we started reading the Bible at the beginning. In Genesis the God who created everything promises Abraham and Sarah: a land and that their descendants will be as many as the stars. After three generations, with the help of Joseph, the descendants, known as Hebrews or Israelites come to live in Egypt. After many years a pharaoh comes to power that remembers Joseph no more and he begins to oppress the Hebrews and God says through Moses, "Let my people go." The Hebrews escape to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Finally descendants of Abraham and Sarah get back to the promised land. At first they live in the land as 12 groups or tribes of nomadic/farmers. When the Philistines would attack a charismatic military leader or "judge" would lead one of the tribes into battle. Religiously the tribes gathered together three times a year for spring, summer and fall ceremonies at a shrine containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The Philistine's aggression drives Israel's transition into a nation with a king. Saul is the first king, followed by David and Solomon. Solomon's oppressive taxation at the end of his reign causes the kingdom to split creating the Southern Kingdom of Judah, ruled by kings of David's family for about 350 years and the Northern Kingdom, Israel, lasting about 200 years.

That brings us to today's story of Jonah, a prophet in the Northern Kingdom, they are surrounded by the Assyrians that control virtually all of the near east and their capital is Nineveh. The outline of the book of Jonah is: God calls Jonah, Jonah disobeys and flees, God intervenes, brings Jonah back to the original call in Nineveh and finally Jonah preaches a five word sermon and 120,000 repent of their evil ways. You need to have a sense of humor to read Jonah.

Reading from Jonah 1:1-17; 3:1-10, 4:1-11

Today we celebrate All Saints Day but for the longest time I wondered, “What is a saint?” and “What does it mean to be a saint?” A saint is a holy one, it means to be set apart for God. The stories we tell also create meaning so when you read a story in the Bible you would expect the prophet, the one the book is named after, to be the holy one. But when you ask, “Who really is captured by the word of God in this story?” you find things you wouldn’t expect—the sailors, the people of Nineveh are moved by God’s word.

You’ve heard me say that we bring two questions to all of scripture, # first, “What does this story tell us, about us?” We put ourselves in the position of the prophet, the one the book is named after, in Jonah’s position and reflect on God’s call in our lives—we reflect on being good stewards of the strengths God gives us. A good working definition of steward/stewardship is #I Peter 4, the theme verse of this years Stewardship Drive, “Be generous with the different gifts God gave you.” Stewardship is about money but is also about being stewards of everything God gives us. Everything is a gift from God. God is the great giver. Martin Luther says in the Small Catechism that we receive from God: food and clothing, home and family, everything we need for our daily lives. Part of our stewardship is accurately assessing our strengths, then discerning or figuring out where and how God is calling us to use them—this is what Jonah was doing and I kind of did it too. Near the end of my first call, at Zion in Anoka, I felt like I really liked being a pastor in a congregation, I felt like God was calling me to continue, but to figure that out or to discern God’s call I went in a bit of an opposite direction: interviewing at church camps and campus

ministries and having conversations with people in the cooperate world. We learn from Jonah that sometimes going in the wrong direction is helpful in clarifying how best to steward/use the strengths God gives us.

#The second question we bring to scripture is, “What does this tell us about God?” First, God calls us to surprising, even seemingly ridiculous things. # Look at Jonah being called to Nineveh. The city of Nineveh still exist just with another name, Mosel in Iraq. You might have heard of Mosel in the news lately, it is occupied by ISIS and the Iraqi military is fighting to get them out of the city. A call from God to modern day Nineveh is just about as ridiculous as in Jonah’s time. Sennacherib, the Assyrian ruler in Nineveh, is well know for beheading and impaling people, particularly Judeans, Jonah is Judean. Knowing this it makes even more sense that Jonah is confused over such a call. But that’s God—at times calling us to surprising, at times ridiculous things.

The second thing this tells us about God is, #God journeys with us... even in our stubborn rebellion and going the wrong way God is with us. Jonah goes west on a ship verses, east via land and God is with Jonah reminding Jonah of the call with sailors and fish. God continues to be in relationship with us—when we go the wrong way—God continues remind us of our callings. God speaks to us through the Bible as we read it and hear preaching and God uses people and experiences in our lives to help us figure out our call.

The third thing this story says about God is, #God’s love is extraordinary. God acts in compassion. God acts in

love for Jonah and that makes sense, Jonah is a Hebrew, one of God's historical people. But God also acts in love for the unlikely people of Nineveh. There is great contention between the Assyrians and the Hebrews and **both** people are met with love, forgiveness and faithfulness. In the story Jonah disobeys God and then repents and goes to the city of his enemy to proclaim the word of the Lord and the people of evil Nineveh obey with deep repentance. In the story the Hebrews and Assyrians have more in common than they would think, both are loved by God.

This Tuesday we will elect people to represent us in local, state and federal government. Many of us have strong feelings about who the right people are to do that work and the people who don't agree with us are often portrayed as evil. What does Jonah tell us about God. God loves all: Democrats, Republicans and third parties... Clintons and Trumps... ISIS, Iraqis and refugees.

The grace that makes us saints is extended to the whole world. If we are so grateful for God's mercy why is it such a problem if God is going to be merciful to someone else? Really is it that big of a problem? For Jonah it is. The thing to consider on this All Saints Sunday, on this Election Sunday—The grace that makes us saints is extended to the whole world—including the people that we are justifiably angry with.

Justice is a part of God's character according to the Old Testament and so is Faithfulness. In the end when faithfulness and justice are in conflict, faithfulness seems

to win out, just barely over the justice. And Jonah would really prefer that God's justice prevail; seemingly unaware of what that would mean for him. Jonah is a sinner... and a saint. And so are we all. We all sin and fall short of what God wants for us. We all want justice to rain down on those we disagree with forgetting our own faults—we are sinners. Yet in the midst of our sin the God of faithfulness, the God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, comes to us, takes root in our lives, and makes us holy, we are saints. Forgiven, loved and sent into the world making it a better place for all.