

Lent Midweek 5 – March 9, 2016

Text: Jonah 2:1-10

Theme: Praying in the Belly of the Great Big Fish

Lying in fish guts for three days, gasping for pockets of air gives one time to think. Jonah had time to think about his sin in turning away from the Lord's command and doing the very opposite of what he was commanded to do. His prayer of confession is short but spot on. Too often we confess our sins in the style of "yeah...but."

"Yeah, I know I shouldn't have taken that extra change Lord BUT I needed to get to my next appointment and it's not my fault the cahier is dumb."

"Yeah, I know I shouldn't have screamed at my kids Lord BUT they are such smart alecks and don't do what I tell them to do."

"Yeah, I'm sorry for my sin Lord, BUT as you can plainly see, there were extenuating circumstances. So it's really not my fault!"

Look at the prayer of Jonah. No yeah, buts. Just the truth of what happened and the consequences of what he did and failed to do.

"You called me to go to Nineveh, Lord. I disobeyed and headed the opposite direction because I did not have faith in you. Now here I am in fish guts and rightly so." Remember, at this point Jonah did not know the end of the story. He had no idea that the fish guts were deliverance. I'm pretty certain that he saw them as further punishment. He prayed to be

delivered not from the fish but from Hell. He knew that he had committed a grave sin when he disobeyed the Lord and his only hope of eternity in paradise was forgiveness. I don't think he had any hope of a do over.

He was thankful that he had not just drowned instead of floating around in the belly of a fish being slowly digested because at least he had the opportunity to seek forgiveness. If only he had just obeyed in the first place. How many times have we had the same feelings? If only we had just obeyed in the first place. We could walk away from this prayer bemoaning the fact that once more, like Jonah, we failed to be obedient to the Lord, but I don't think that is the primary message in this prayer.

The primary lesson for us is confession without qualification and to simply cling to the cross. We are going to make mistakes. Original sin plagues us even as it plagued Jonah and we are going to fail time and time again. Sin is inevitable. If we vow right now never to sin again, we will fail, no doubt before the night air hits our faces on the way out to our cars. But we have seen what Jonah had not seen, what Jonah could not have seen because Christ would not become flesh for some 800 years. What we have seen that Jesus Christ died to pay for all our sins. All sins are all forgiven. Now, already all of our sins are completely forgiven and we stand before the throne of God blameless and holy.

As Jonah spent three days in a tomb of fish guts to be saved, our Lord spent three days in a real tomb to save us. No matter the particular situation in which we find ourselves, eventually we will either survive or die but either way, we inherit heaven because Christ won it for us. So Jonah's prayer is important for us. He had no hope for mortal life but he did cling to God's promise of eternal life. We have no fear of losing eternal life unless we lose our connection to Christ. And the only way to lose our connection to Christ is to intentionally break it or for our faith to die. And how is our faith fed? Word and Sacrament. Every time we hear those sweet words of absolution, "as a called and ordained servant of the Word, I announce to you the grace of God and by his command and in his stead, I forgive you all of your sins," our faith is strengthened and we are reminded that we have already been delivered from this life. Whether we live or die, we never have to fear, for the God who commands the sea has already prepared paradise for us.

We have no need for "yeah but" prayers. We can honestly and forthrightly confess our sin to God because we already know that we cannot justify ourselves and we have no need to do so. We have already been justified. Our salvation is secure and the God of our salvation walks with us until the day we are delivered into his presence.