



GPS GUIDE: OCTOBER 10, 2021

Grow. Pray. Study

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon: Course Correction

Jonah (selected texts from chapters 1-3)

The Lord's word came to Jonah, Amittai's son: "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their evil has come to my attention." So Jonah got up—to flee to Tarshish from the Lord! He went down to Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to go with them to Tarshish, away from the Lord. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, so that there was a great storm on the sea; the ship looked like it might be broken to pieces. The men rowed to reach dry land, but they couldn't manage it because the sea continued to rage against them. So they called on the Lord, saying, "Please, Lord, don't let us perish on account of this man's life, and don't blame us for innocent blood! You are the Lord: whatever you want, you can do." Then they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased its raging. Meanwhile, the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish: "I called out to the Lord in my distress, and he answered me. From the belly of the underworld[a] I cried out for help; you have heard my voice. Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land. The Lord's word came to Jonah a second time: "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and declare against it the proclamation that I am commanding you." And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the Lord's word.

Monday: Read 1 Kings 19:1-8

Elijah is surely in a bad place. We know this because he says so. But Elijah responds in a way that seems downright surprising to anyone who has followed his ministry just prior to this news which terrified him. I mean, in the stories before he has only known success, defeating, in spectacular fashion, the prophets of those puny, little "g" gods. But now? He is heard to have dismissed his servant—a sure sign that he is done with the ministry to which he had been called. He is also said to have traveled a day's journey into the wilderness—again, indicating that he is abandoning Yahweh's People. When we meet up with him, Elijah has settled under a solitary broom tree and has announced he is done. Done with all of it. Done not only with his ministry but also done with his life. It's hard to figure, yes, and at least to our way of thinking, the story doesn't give us nearly enough to go on. Indeed, for all of our guesses as to Elijah's psychological state, we really aren't told. And yet, it is a fair guess to say that exhaustion and now sheer terror have just caught up with him. And Elijah is just done. Perhaps we can relate. Life can beat us up, tear us down, leave us battered and bruised. At times we all feel like we have nothing left to give. But in this text, we discover at that very moment of despair God offers Elijah a meal. Sustenance for the body and the soul. Elijah may be done. But God is not done with Elijah. And God is not done with us either. Have you ever found yourself 'done'? In a place where you just couldn't do it anymore? How did you learn

God was not yet 'done' with you? How have you seen this truth expressed in our community at FCC? What do you think God is doing here?

Prayer: God of the quiet whispers, remind us that we are not finished, that you are still working, and that you provide all we need to continue the work you are doing in and through us. Amen.

Tuesday: Read Genesis 32: 22-24

We want, as much as we can, to approach this overly familiar text with fresh eyes, the better to be able to hear something fresh in these words. "He (Jacob) got up that night and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and forded the ford of the Jabbok" "He took them and forded them across the stream, and forded what was his, too. Jacob was left alone" The scene is very well painted for us. The long and noisy trek from Haran, a journey of some days, characterized by the loud hooves of fine livestock, in effect stolen from Uncle Laban, the clamoring protestations of two sister-wives and two very intimate maids, and the fuss and bother of eleven howling children, ends suddenly at the ford of the Jabbok, a small stream emptying into the Jordan River from the east. After sending this motley company across the stream, Jacob finally finds himself alone. It must have been a blessed moment, as he listened to the jarring sounds of his huge family fade into the distance. But out of nowhere, Jacob is jumped by "a man" who "wrestled with him until the breaking of the day" There is apparently no time at all between the disappearance of Jacob's retinue and the attack of the man. The Hebrew clearly says "man," not angel, not God. And the man "wrestles" (*ye'hbek*), a word suspiciously close consonantly to Jacob's own name (*y'acob*). We should perhaps stop here in the story and inquire after the possible identity of this man. With whom might we expect the rascal Jacob, the "grabber" of birthright and blessing from brother and father, the clever one who took family and goods from Laban with a series of ruses, to wrestle? Three possible suspects have just been named: Esau, Isaac, Laban. Has not Jacob wrestled with each of these and won? Yet, we ought not overlook another possibility: Jacob himself. Finally, is it not Jacob who needs to battle his own grasping life in order to discover his place in the ongoing story of Israel and God's choice of them? Could it be that Jacob wrestles, and wrestles, and wrestles, with who he is, with what he has done, with how he has lived, and Jacob limps away from that encounter, in the words of theologian Henri Nouwen, "as a wounded healer, not a wounded wounder." How have you been your own "worst enemy" as you seek to follow God's call? How might you be getting in the way of God's work within? What could you do today to step (or limp) into something new?

Prayer: Holy One, help me to find the path forward in healing for myself and for your whole creation as I live into your will. Amen.

Wednesday: Read John 17:15-17, 25-27, John 21:15-17

Rash and brash, Peter is the one on whom we can count to do what Peter does best — impetuosity and impulsivity. From wanting a full body bath from Jesus at the foot washing, to striding out of the garden and cutting off the ear of Malchus, to getting dressed and jumping in the lake to get to Jesus on the shore, yes, indeed, we've come to expect such behavior from Peter. With this perspective in place, it's easy to reduce the conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21 to a reinstatement of Peter's discipleship or an attempt at some kind of reconciliation for a relationship gone bad. Except nowhere in the story does Jesus utter the words, "I forgive you" because Peter hasn't done anything deserving of Jesus' forgiveness. No, the person who needs to forgive Peter, well, is Peter himself. And yet, forgiveness is perhaps not the issue at all. A re-reading of Peter's denial in John exposes his true rejection — that of his own identity. The question asked of Peter is not, as it is in the Synoptic Gospels, "do you know the man?" To which Peter responds, "I don't know the

man." Rather, in the Fourth Gospel, the inquiry posed to Peter is, "aren't you one of his disciples?" Peter's response? "I AM not." So, the conversation between Jesus and Peter should take on a completely different meaning. Jesus does not blame or shame Peter. Jesus does not ask for Peter's repentance. Jesus does not ask three times, "Peter, do you love me?" to remind Peter of his three-fold denial, to test him or to trap him. Instead, Jesus reaffirms who Peter needs to be; the disciple Jesus needs him to be. Denying our identity is an all too often reality. We deny who we are because we worry that we won't meet expectations. We deny who we are because we are afraid to disappoint. We deny who we are because we could be judged, even rejected, for that truth. We deny who we are because we do not believe that we will be liked for who we truly are, or that we will be loved for who we truly are. It's hard to believe that Jesus believes in us. But Peter's story reminds us that this is precisely how Jesus operates. We are exactly the disciples Jesus needs, the disciples the world needs. How will we respond?

Prayer: Lord, give us the courage to boldly proclaim, "Lord you know everything; you know that I love you." May we feed your sheep. Amen.

Thursday: Read 1 Samuel 3:1-20

A few years ago, I experienced what might be called a reoccurring dream. At least it seemed like a dream. It was always in those first moments after I had drifted off to sleep. I would awake with a start, disoriented and convinced that I had a guest in my home. Only I was not prepared. For you see, we did not have guests often. And so, my guest room was used as 'storage'—things were almost always piled on the bed in there. Each time, I would lie in my confusion, trying to sort out who it was who was there and as a result of my lack of hospitality, had no place to sleep. Eventually I would wake up enough to realize that it was, in fact, only a 'dream.' This happened more than once. It happened so many times, in fact that finally I began to share it with friends, who, though patient enough to hear me out as I described my 'dream,' could only shake their heads, as unable as I was to make sense of it. This had been going on for some time before one friend said "Well, I can't say for sure, of course, but I can't help but wonder if your guest is Jesus." To tell you the truth, at the time I was more than a little bit embarrassed. Of course, I couldn't say for sure either, but if it WAS Jesus? Well, then clearly I was not making room—I was unprepared. And I was not proud of this. Looking back now, I find I'm shaking my head at my reaction then. As if one could ever be fully prepared. More than that, what a wonder it is to think that perhaps Jesus would be so persistent in a way that I could sense it—to get near to me. Too much of the time it seems as though 'the word of the Lord is rare.' If I was, in fact, the recipient of such an experience? Well wouldn't that be something? And so I listen in as the boy Samuel is being summoned in the night—being called by name. Oh, I expect that together, you and I feel and completely understand his confusion for it was and still is a thing of wonder that God's voice would be calling us in the night. And yes, while the particulars are different, it would seem that God 'calling' me in the night is for much the same purpose he had with young Samuel so many generations ago. To be near to us. To make a home with us. To let us know we are loved. To settle into our guest rooms --- and more than that, into the center of our lives. Have you ever had an experience like young Samuel? If so, did you recognize the God's voice then? Did someone point you in the right direction? If you have had such an experience, what did you take from it? What was the message for you? How might you 'translate' the 'word of the Lord' spoken then into today's world?

Prayer: Ever-present God, may we hear 'the word of the Lord' as you remind us that you have made your home with us. Amen.

Friday: Read Judges 4:3-4

Judges 4:3 And the women-and-men-of-Israel cried out to the Faithful One for help; for King Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the women-and-men-of-Israel cruelly twenty years. 4 Deborah, a woman, a female prophet, a fiery woman, she was judging Israel at that time. For twenty years Jews suffered under Canaanite oppression; Deborah suffered with her people before God called her as a prophet and judge. We don't really know how she came to be a prophet or judge. Rev. Dr. Will Gafney, professor of Hebrew at Bright Divinity, who translated the passage above says, "God called her. She seems like a pretty unlikely candidate. No one knows much about her or her family. She doesn't have any experience. People didn't really know what to do with her. But she answered the call and did what she could. And that made all the difference." The truth is all of our communities need that, need unlikely people, with dubious gifts, and a questionable resume to answer God's call. To take a risk and say yes to God. Deborah just did what she could with the gifts God had given her to help her family, her community. That's how the people of God made it through those difficult days of Canaanite oppression, every day, every week, every month, every year for twenty years, they worked together as a community. Each did their part to hold it together and support each other. Deborah teaches us that sometimes God calls us to do uncomfortable, hard things. She teaches us that God often calls the ill-equipped and the ordinary. She teaches us that we all are called, **all of us**. The question that each of us must answer is: Are we living out our divine calling? Have you experienced a time when God called you to something that you weren't sure you could do? How did you respond? What happened? What might God be calling you to now?

Prayer: Holy God, Help me to hear your divine calling and give me the courage to say yes. Amen.

Saturday: Read Acts 16:13-15

The Spirit leads Paul and Silas to Philippi, the most important city in the district of Macedonia. The Jews living in diaspora in Philippi gather on the Sabbath outside the city gates, by the river to pray. They spoke to the women gathered there and met a woman named Lydia who came from Thyatira and sold expensive purple clothes. She was a businesswoman of distinction in a time when women's leadership of any kind was rare. And as Paul and Silas shared the Good News of Jesus, "The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly." So what happens next? When we look deeply into Lydia's response we see that she welcomes the Spirit of God to change her life. In this moment she is transformed, a woman of wealth and means who opens her home to the traveling apostles, and therefore to the new church that will form in Philippi. Her home will become the site of the first Christian community in her city. She will be the matron of the church, who provides for the needs of all who come to follow Jesus. Think about how Lydia got here. Because Lydia was faithful and determined, she showed up on the sabbath day, expecting nothing out of the ordinary. And then, because she was open to the movement of the Spirit when she met these traveling preachers, who share with her this life-changing message, Lydia shows us the power of God to change us. She shows us what it is like to live into baptism. God's gift of new life is freely given out of love and generosity, and Lydia shows us how the baptized are supposed to respond—with greater love and generosity toward our neighbors. What does it look like for us to follow in Paul, Silas, and Lydia's footsteps? What is it you have to offer in response to the forgiveness you have received? How can you serve the church and the world with a generosity that flows from a grateful heart?

Prayer: May our love and generosity flow freely as we serve the church and the world in love. Amen.