

Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jonah 1:1-3, 3:1-5, 4:1-11

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So 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. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He 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. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Then 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.

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. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When 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."

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

Sermon

Last week we talked about our identity based on our nickname, “the little church in the wildwood.” This week we are turning to our mission statement. Who knows what our mission statement is? Hint: it is on our bulletin covers most every week. “Preparing and sending Spirit-filled disciples who walk with Christ into the world to glorify God.” This statement has been our mission statement for about a decade, but I have to admit that I have not been good, as a pastor, at living into this statement. In fact, maybe like many of you, I have barely taken notice of it thinking of it as a historical statement that has very little relevance or meaning for us today. Yet each week, for members and visitors alike, this statement sits on the front cover of the bulletin. What might it say about our identity? Who we are and who God is calling us to be?

The book of Jonah is one most of us are taught when we are young children, and we remember it mostly because of the great fish that swallows Jonah whole. But, even without the fish, Jonah’s tale is still mesmerizing. Here is a prophetic character to whom the word of the Lord comes, telling him to go to Nineveh. His immediate response is to go the opposite way, to a foreign land where he hoped to hide from God. After the incident with storm and the fish, the word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time. “Will you now go to Nineveh like I asked?” Reluctantly Jonah goes, shares what God had told him, and the people respond to his message. They repent and pray for mercy. And God grants them mercy. And Jonah... well he throws an all out tantrum. Where is the fairness, where is the justice? This city has been wicked for so long and what do you do after one day of repentance? You show mercy. Where was that mercy for Israel when the Babylonians came? Where is that mercy for your children Israel who are still in exile? And so Jonah sits upon the hill, looking down upon the city, waiting to see what God does, waiting to see how long it takes before Nineveh returns to its wicked ways. Jonah’s heart is filled with hate and a sense of injustice. That is when the bush appeared. At first Jonah receives comfort from the bush, and then it is taken away. His reaction to the bush is the same as his reaction to the saving of the city. In the first case Jonah is angry at God’s mercy; now he misses God’s protective grace. But God asks, where should our priorities be, personal comfort or the lives of our neighbors?

White Lick Presbyterian, like Jonah, is being called to walk with Christ into the world to glorify God. The world for us begins with our own neighborhoods and reaches out from there. For a while now, we have been skipping over our communities. We reach out to Indianapolis, to mission opportunities in Alabama and Mexico and the Dominican Republic. But we have not reached out to Brownsburg or Avon, Pittsboro or Danville. But we will. It begins with reaching out and connecting, as a congregation, to the communities around us. We will participate in the 4th of July parade in Brownsburg and on August 1st we will be a part of the National Night Out in Avon. Then in September, we will walk in and pray for neighborhoods within our communities. We will walk with Christ into the world to glorify God.

We will also invite the world to come and be Spirit-filled. On July 29th we will have a dessert fest event where the proceeds will go to funding mission opportunities within our congregation and community. On the weekend of August 19th and 20 we have a family event where we will engage the movie Moana and the story of Esther. On September 16th we will have a Gospel Choir event and on November 4th we will have our annual Chili Supper. Each of these events give a concrete way for us to invite the community to come and engage, to have them experience what the Spirit is doing here. And, as always, we have opportunities to welcome others to worship and experience God's mercy and grace.

Going into the world is not easy, it takes time and energy, vision and planning, and it takes courage to take a chance and expect that people are people, people have needs and gifts, pain and joy. But the calling has never changed, Christ called his disciples, the Lord called Jonah, and the Holy Spirit is calling White Lick to look outside of these four walls, to walk with Christ into the world, to give thanks for grace and mercy over personal comforts and elevation. We are called to walk into the world to glorify God. that is the identity of our mission statement, that is the identity we will live into, with the help of God. Amen