

DATE: JANUARY 25, 2015
SCRIPTURES: JONAH 3:1-5, 10; MARK 1:14-21
TITLE: GOD OF POSSIBILITY

SOON AFTER HE BEGINS HIS MINISTRY,
JESUS CALLS FOUR MEN,
FIRST SIMON AND ANDREW,
THEN JOHN AND JAMES,
TO COME AND FOLLOW HIM.
THE MEN ARE COMMON LABORERS, FISHERMEN,
DOING WHAT FISHERMEN DO,
CASTING AND MENDING THEIR NETS.
EACH HAS A LIFE THEY ARE LIVING;
THEY HAVE HOMES AND A WIFE AND CHILDREN;
THEY ARE ACTIVE VILLAGE LIFE
AND MEMBERS OF A FAITH COMMUNITY
THERE IS NOTHING EXTRAORDINARY ABOUT THE MEN
THAT PROMPTS JESUS TO CALL THEM.
NONETHELESS, JESUS CALLS THEM SAYING,
“FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL MAKE YOU
BECOME FISHERS OF MEN.”
HE CALLS THEM
NOT BECAUSE OF WHO THEY ARE
BUT OF WHO THEY CAN BECOME.
IT IS THAT POSSIBILITY,
THE POSSIBILITY OF BECOMING WHO THEY ARE NOT,
THAT PROMPTS THE FOUR MEN
TO LEAVE WHAT THEY ARE DOING
AND FOLLOW JESUS.

HEARING THE WORD, *REPENT*, TODAY,
WE IMMEDIATELY ASSOCIATE IT WITH SIN,
REPENT OF YOUR SINS,
TURN AWAY FROM YOUR SIN.
THAT CONNECTION WAS MADE VERY EARLY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH.
JOHN THE BAPTIST MADE IT
YEARS BEFORE THE CHURCH WAS FOUNDED.
HE PRACTICED BAPTISM FOR THE REPENTANCE OF SIN
AND URGED PEOPLE TO BE BAPTIZED
AS A SIGN OF THEIR REPENTANCE.
YET, THE WORD *REPENT* DOES NOT ONLY MEAN TURN AWAY FROM SIN.
IT CAN ALSO MEAN
TURN AWAY FROM YOU ARE DOING,
TURN AWAY FROM WHAT YOU PREVIOUSLY BELIEVED,
“ . . . TURN AWAY FROM YOUR PRIOR TRUSTS AND LOYALTIES.”
(LEE BARRETT, “THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE, *FEASTING ON THE WORD, YEAR B, VOL. 2, P.*).
JESUS IS USING *REPENT* IN THIS WAY WHEN HE ANNOUNCES,
“THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND;
REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL.”

REPENT ~

TURN AWAY FROM WHAT YOU ARE CURRENTLY DOING.

TURN AWAY FROM WHAT YOU HAVE BELIEVED UP TO NOW,

TURN AWAY FROM YOUR CURRENT TRUSTS AND LOYALTIES.

LONG BEFORE JESUS INVITES US TO REPENT BY CONFESSING OUR SIN,

HE INVITES US TO REPENT, TO TURN AWAY,

AND FOLLOW HIM.

IF AND WHEN WE DO,

HE MAKES US

FISHERS OF MEN AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN

FISHERS OF THE POSSIBILITY GOD CONTINUALLY

SEEKS TO BIRTH IN THE WORLD.

JESUS' CALL OF THE FOUR FISHERMEN

SHIFTS THEIR PERCEPTION OF THEMSELVES.

IT AWAKENS THEM TO THE POSSIBILITY

THAT THEY MIGHT BECOME SOMETHING THEY ARE NOT,

THAT THEY TOO MIGHT BECOME FISHERS OF PEOPLE,

PROCLAIMERS OF GOD'S POSSIBILITY IN THE WORLD.

IT IS EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT

FOR US TO CHANGE OUR PERCEPTION

OF THE WORLD, OTHERS AND OURSELVES

FOR OUR EXPERIENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS

MOLD US AND MAKE US.

THEY IMPACT WHO WE ARE, HOW WE SEE, WHAT WE SEE.

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT,

CHANGE STARTS WITH SOMETHING OUTSIDE OF, BEYOND OURSELVES.

THAT "SOMETHING" BECOMES A CATALYST OF CHANGE.

SOMEONE INVITES US TO COME AND SEE.

A TEACHER TELLS US WE ARE GOOD

AT EXPLAINING MATH PROBLEMS TO OUR CLASSMATES.

WE DISCOVER WE HAVE A KNACK OR A LOVE

FOR FIXING CARS OR BUILDING THINGS OR TAKING CARE OF ANIMALS.

OUR PASTOR SUGGESTS WE THINK ABOUT GOING TO SEMINARY.

SOMETHING HAPPENS AND SUDDENLY THE DOOR

OF LIFE-GIVING, LIFE-ENHANCING POSSIBILITY OPENS WIDE.

THAT IS A KINGDOM THING,

FOR GOD IS CONTINUALLY MOVING OVER

THE WATERS OF OUR LIVES SEEKING THE VERY BEST FOR US.

GOD IS IN THE BUSINESS OF AWAKENING US TO POSSIBILITY,

TO THE POSSIBILITY OF

NEW WAYS THINKING, NEW WAYS OF BEING, NEW WAYS OF LIVING.

ALWAYS, GOD'S POSSIBILITY

URNS US IN A NEW DIRECTION,

SETS US A NEW PATH,

OPENS US TO NEW UNDERSTANDING.

EVEN AS GOD IS BIRTHING NEW POSSIBILITY IN OUR LIVES,

GOD ALLOWS US TO CHOOSE TO TURN AND FOLLOW OR NOT.

JONAH IS A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE
OF SOMEONE, WHO TURNS AWAY FROM GOD'S POSSIBILITY
NOT ONCE BUT REPEATEDLY.
GOD CALLS JONAH TO GO TO NINEVEH
AND TELL THE PEOPLE TO REPENT OF THEIR WICKED WAYS.
NINEVEH IS THE CAPITOL OF ASSYRIA,
WHICH AT THE TIME OF JONAH'S CALL,
IS THE AT THE TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN IN PALESTINE.
JONAH KNOWS HE WILL BE IN DANGER
IF HE DELIVERS THAT MESSAGE TO THE NINEVITES.
SO, HE BOARDS A SHIP BOUND FOR TARSHISH
WHICH IS 2000 MILES IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.
THAT DOES NOT WORK OUT WELL FOR JONAH.
A HUGE STORM COMES UP.
IT TOSSES THE SHIP TO AND FRO LIKE A MATCHSTICK.
THE SAILORS, KNOWING SOMETHING **FOUL** IS AFOOT,
TOSS THE DICE TO SEE WHO HAS BROUGHT THE TRAGEDY UPON THEM
AND LEARN THE CULPRIT IS JONAH.
REALIZING THE JIG IS UP,
JONAH TELLS THE SAILORS TO TOSS HIM OVERBOARD,
WHICH THEY DO.
IMMEDIATELY A WHALE SWALLOWS JONAH.
AFTER 3 UNPLEASANT DAYS, THE WHALE VOMITS JONAH ON DRY LAND.

THAT EXPERIENCE TEACHES JONAH HE CANNOT HIDE FROM GOD.
SO, WHEN GOD CALLS HIM TO GO TO NINEVEH A SECOND TIME,
JONAH GOES.
JONAH STARTS ON THE CITY'S OUTSKIRTS AND BEGINS PROCLAIMING,
"FORTY DAYS AND NINEVEH WILL BE NO MORE."
IT TAKES HIM THREE DAYS TO CROSS NINEVEH.
NEVER IN THOSE THREE DAYS
DOES JONAH SPEAK A WORD ABOUT GOD'S MERCY AND GRACE.
NEVER DOES HE SUGGEST THAT GOD WILL RELENT
IF THE PEOPLE REPENT, TURN AWAY FROM THEIR WICKEDNESS.
HE REMAINS SILENT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A DIFFERENT OUTCOME
THOUGH BOTH HIS PEOPLE AND HE HAVE BEEN THE RECIPIENTS
OF GOD'S SAVING GRACE TIME AND AGAIN.
JONAH IS ANGRY,
ANGRY WITH GOD,
ANGRY WITH THE NINEVITES,
ANGRY WITH HIMSELF.
HIS ANGER LEADS HIM TO PREACH A MESSAGE OF FIRE AND BRIMSTONE.
THEN WAITS TO SEE THE COMING DESTRUCTION.

WONDER OF WONDERS!
THE NINEVITES HEAR AND BELIEVE JONAH'S PROCLAMATION.
THEY REPENT,
ONE AND ALL,
FROM THE GREATEST TO THE LEAST,

EVEN THE BEASTS OF THE FIELD.
THEY PUT ON SACKCLOTH AND ASHES
AND URGENTLY CALL UPON GOD
SO THEY WILL NOT PERISH.
SEEING THEIR CONTRITION, GOD RELENTS.

YOU WOULD THINK THAT JONAH WOULD BE HAPPY
THAT THE PEOPLE HEARD AND BELIEVED HIM.
BUT, HE'S NOT.
HE FURIOUS WITH GOD AND CRIES OUT,
"I KNEW IT!
KNEW THAT YOU ARE A GRACIOUS AND COMPASSIONATE GOD,
A GOD WHO RELENTS FROM SENDING CALAMITY.
LET ME DIE,
FOR IT IS BETTER FOR ME TO DIE THAN LIVE."
AFTERWARDS, JONAH WITHDRAWS TO A PLACE OUTSIDE THE CITY
AND SITS THERE IN THE HOT SUN.
GOD CAUSES A VINE TO GROW UP AND PROVIDE SHADE FOR JONAH.
WHEN THE VINE WITHERS AND DIES,
JONAH ONCE AGAIN BEGINS TO RAIL AT GOD.
GOD SAYS TO JONAH,
"IF YOU FEEL SORROW FOR THE LOSS OF A PLANT,
DON'T YOU THINK I CAN FEEL SORROW
FOR THE LOSS OF 120,000 PEOPLE?"

INTERESTINGLY, WE DON'T GET TO HEAR
JONAH'S RESPONSE TO GOD'S QUESTION.
HIS STORY ENDS THERE.
THAT ENDING MAY BE UNSATISFACTORY FOR US;
YET, IT SERVES A PURPOSE.
IT EMPHASIZES GOD'S ACTION.
IT REMINDS US
THAT GOD CONTINUALLY AND REPEATEDLY
SETS LIFE GIVING POSSIBILITY BEFORE US
REGARDLESS OF OUR RESPONSE TO US.
THINK ABOUT IT.
REPEATEDLY, GOD CALLS JONAH TO EMBRACE POSSIBILITY,
TO EMBRACE
A NEW WAY OF THINKING,
A NEW WAY OF BEING,
A NEW WAY OF LIVING.
REPEATEDLY, JONAH TURNS AND RUNS AWAY FROM GOD.
WHEN HE DOES DO AS GOD ASKS,
HE DOES IT BEGRUDGINGLY AND HALFHEARTEDLY
AND IN THE PROCESS DISTORTS GOD'S CHARACTER.
REGARDLESS, GOD CONTINUES TO REACH OUT TO JONAH
AND EXTEND TO HIM THE POSSIBILITY
OF THINKING ANEW, SEEING ANEW, LIVING ANEW.
HE OFFERS JONAH THE POSSIBILITY

OF GROWING IN TOLERANCE, FORGIVENESS, AND COMPASSION.
IN THE END, WE DON'T KNOW HOW JONAH RESPONDS TO GOD.
BUT, WE CAN TRUST
GOD WILL CONTINUE REACHING OUT TO HIM,
FOR THE STORY ASSURES
OUR GOD IS A GOD OF LOVE AND COMPASSION,
NOT WRATH.
OUR GOD IS A GOD OF UNFETTERED POSSIBILITY,
A GOD WHO CALLS US TO COME AND FOLLOW
ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIFE. AMEN.