*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

August 21 - 26

“Jonah”

**Monday, August 21 Jonah 1:1-3**

*“Jonah ran away from the Lord”*

These three verses are full of detailed action, drawing us into the story. The word of God comes to Jonah telling him to preach against the wicked city of Nineveh (about 550 miles northeast of Jerusalem), but Jonah runs in the opposite direction, heading for Tarshish (located in southern Spain). He goes down to the coastal city of Joppa, finds a ship, pays the fare, goes aboard, and sets sail.

The reasons for Jonah’s running cannot be understood without historical background. Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, was Israel’s worst enemy and the bane of the ancient world. They were a powerful and well-developed civilization, known for their brutal and grisly treatment of their enemies. Jonah’s response to God’s directive can be understood as fear of what would happen to him (a Jew) in that city, rebellion against God’s command to travel such a far distance, or moral opposition to God’s mercy that has determined to offer salvation to this great, albeit wicked, city.

*All are worthy of your grace, Lord, even those who are far from you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 22 Jonah 1:4-12**

*“The Lord sent a great wind on the sea”*

The sailors are afraid because of the storm and cry out to their gods. The captain wakes Jonah to enlist him to pray, and the men cast lots and discover Jonah’s sin. They interrogate him, hear his witness to God, and become even more terrified, since Jonah’s God is “the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” They chastise him for his foolishness in trying to run away from God. The pagan sailors seem to know the rules of relationships to gods. It is on account of this fleeing prophet that God is making the sea “rougher and rougher.”

In the end the sailors desperately ask Jonah what they should do to him to calm the sea. The sailor’s questioning and the urgency of God’s storm finally pry from Jonah a confession of guilt (verse 12), just as they had pried a confession of faith. He has, albeit under duress, fulfilled his calling as a true prophet of God by witnessing to the God of heaven, confessing his sin, and instructing the sailors to act. He has also taken a vital step toward his own calling in that he offers himself as a sure sacrifice for their safety.

*When I run from you, Lord, you pursue me in order to bring me back. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 23 Jonah 1:13-17**

*“The men did their best to row back to land”*

The sailors do not want to kill God’s prophet, so they attempt to row back to land. They know Jonah is a serious problem, but they do not want to be held responsible for killing the prophet of such a powerful god. But God will not allow an easy ending here. Each time his storm is mentioned, the sailors move closer to the truth. At first, they cry out to their own gods. The second time, they ask God’s prophet what to do. Now, the third time that God’s storm heightens, they cry out “to the Lord” to be spared punishment for taking Jonah’s life (by throwing him overboard).

The sailors witness God’s power over creation, and they experience his saving deliverance in answer to their prayer. Consequently, they confess him as Creator and Deliverer. They also act on their belief by offering a sacrifice, an expression of worship, and they make vows to God which are public expressions of their intent to continue in faithful worship. Even in Jonah’s disobedience, God has made him effective in his calling as a prophet, bringing people to faith in God.

*You are at work in the world, Lord, bringing people to yourself. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

August 21 - 26

“Jonah”

**Thursday, August 24 Jonah 2:1-10**

*“Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish”*

The chapter is Jonah’s psalm of thanks from within the belly of the fish. The song primarily recounts Jonah’s distress in the water and gives thanks for his rescue. It begins with a summary of his cry for help (verse 2) and continues with four more stanzas describing Jonah’s sinking in the water before he is swallowed by the fish (verses 3-6). In the refrain (verses 7-9) Jonah summarizes his cry for rescue and declares God as the true source of salvation. Then, the narrator tells us, God ordered the fish to spit up Jonah onto dry land.

The amazing context of this poetic prayer is Jonah’s gratitude *while inside* the fish. He fully expected to die in the water. His thanksgiving within the belly of a fish is a proclamation of joy, with the realization that God has delivered him in spite of his disobedient running from the Lord. Though he is not yet on dry land, his faith reaches a new dimension of understanding. He seems to have no doubt that, as he was delivered from drowning, he will also eventually be delivered safely to the shore.

*I will praise and give you thanks, Lord, in all circumstances. Amen.*

**Friday, August 25 Jonah 3:1-10**

*“This time Jonah obeyed the Lord’s command”*

God’s word comes to Jonah a second time and tells him to go to the great city and proclaim the message given him by God. This time Jonah obeys and immediately goes to Nineveh and begins to proclaim the message that God will “overturn” the city within forty days. On the first day of the three-day job of preaching throughout the city, the Ninevites believe and the rest of the chapter continues with their dramatic public repentance of evil and violence. The people, prior to the king’s command, declare a fast and put on sack cloth as a sign of sorrow for their sinful deeds.

When the king hears, he joins in the outward sign of repentance and issues a proclamation of fasting and sackcloth, even for the animals. In humility he offers the hope that God may yet relent and the city will not perish. The chapter concludes with God’s compassion and forgiveness. This is a great miracle. Even Israel’s worst enemies, the most unlikely people, believe, repent, and receive God’s compassion and forgiveness.

*No one is beyond your mercy, Lord, not even my worst enemy. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 26 Jonah 4:1-11**

*“You are a gracious and compassionate God”*

God’s love for the whole creation is placed in front of us in the final question of the book: “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” A city distant from Israel, filled with ignorant people (and all its cattle), is placed before us as a primary object of God’s concern and love. The answer to God’s question is left open to us, but the answer God seeks from Jonah and from us is clearly, “Yes!” God’s intention is for all to know his love, insider and outsider alike. We are called to affirm his intention and to participate in the communication of his concern and love.

Another significant application of the chapter is our common human experience of protection and exposure in relation to God. So many of our actions to protect or shield ourselves from life are vain attempts to ward off catastrophe or trouble. Only God can save. Jonah seeks safety in the belly of a ship but finds it only in God’s fish. He seeks protection by building a shelter, but it is God’s plant that gives him true shade. Seeking protection apart from God leads to false security because life is fragile and unpredictable.

*I rely on you, Lord, for you are the source of my salvation and my security. Amen.*