

January 24, 2021

Third Sunday after Epiphany



**“What Can We Learn
from a Man and a Fish?”**

St. John United Church of Christ

10207 Lincoln Trail

Fairview Heights, IL

Telephone 397-6323

SECRETARY – JUDY HARTMANN

Rev. Rosemary Captain

Prayers and Liturgy by

Rev. Madison Shockley

*Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12;
1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20*

CALL TO WORSHIP:

We gather to respond to the call of God’s love

Thankful that someone cared enough to share this good news with us.

May we be compassionate enough to share this divine presence with others.

Love, when shared, is not divided but multiplied.

Love, given away, is not diminished but expanded.

May our gathering beckon and welcome those near and far to know the love of this divine presence.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

From deep within us we know of a loving presence.

All around us we see glory, beauty, life and light.

We have no words for what we experience so we cry out, “God!”. In this moment of worship may that

loving presence grow deeper, may our awareness of the divine presence around us grow more intense.

May we, gathered in this place, learn to pay more attention to God, who loves us at all times and in all

places. God, of love and life, in this moment of prayer be more and more in us that we might live

more and more in you. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Jonah 1-4

Commissioning of a reluctant prophet: 1 The LORD’s word came to the Prophet Jonah, Amittai’s son: ²“Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and

cry out against it, for their evil has come to my attention.”

³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ The sailors were terrified, and each one cried out to his god. They hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to make it lighter.

Now Jonah had gone down into the hold of the vessel to lie down and was deep in sleep. ⁶ The ship’s officer came and said to him, “How can you possibly be sleeping so deeply? Get up! Call on your god! Perhaps the god will give some thought to us so that we won’t perish.”

⁷ Meanwhile, the sailors said to each other, “Come on, let’s cast lots so that we might learn who is to blame for this evil that’s happening to us.” They cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they said to him, “Tell us, since you’re the cause of this evil happening to us: What do you do and where are you from? What’s your country and of what people are you?”

⁹ He said to them, “I’m a Hebrew. I worship the LORD, the God of heaven—who made the sea and the dry land.” ¹⁰ Then the men were terrified and said to him, “What have you done?” (The men

knew that Jonah was fleeing from the LORD, because he had told them.)

¹¹ They said to him, “What will we do about you so that the sea will become calm around us?” (The sea was continuing to rage.)

¹² He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea! Then the sea will become calm around you. I know it’s my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

¹³ The men rowed to reach dry land, but they couldn’t manage it because the sea continued to rage against them. ¹⁴ 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.” ¹⁵ Then they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased its raging. ¹⁶ The men worshipped



the LORD with a profound reverence; they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made solemn promises.

No escape for the prophet

¹⁷ Meanwhile, the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

² Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish: ² “I called out to the LORD in my distress, and he answered me. From the belly of the underworld I cried out for help; you have heard my



voice. ¹⁰ Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land.

Nineveh hears God's word

³ The LORD's word came to Jonah a second time: ² "Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and declare against it the proclamation that I am commanding you." ³ And Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, according to the LORD's word. (Now Nineveh was indeed an enormous city, a three days' walk across.)

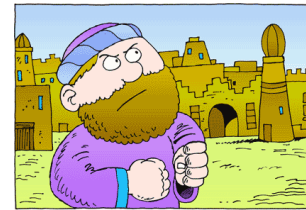
⁴ Jonah started into the city, walking one day, and he cried out, "Just forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown!" ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on mourning clothes, from the greatest of them to the least significant.

⁶ When word of it reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, stripped himself of his robe, covered himself with mourning clothes, and sat in ashes. ⁷ Then he announced, "In Nineveh, by decree of the king and his officials: Neither human nor animal, cattle nor flock, will taste anything! No grazing and no drinking water!" ⁸ Let humans and animals alike put on mourning clothes, and let them call upon God forcefully! And let all persons stop their evil behavior and the violence that's under their control!" ⁹ He thought, Who knows? God may

see this and turn from his wrath, so that we might not perish.

¹⁰ God saw what they were doing—that they had ceased their evil behavior. So God stopped planning to destroy them, and he didn't do it.

Jonah balks at God's mercy



⁴ But Jonah thought this was utterly wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "Come on, LORD! Wasn't this precisely my point when I was back in my own land? This is why I fled to Tarshish earlier! I know that you are a merciful and compassionate God, very patient, full of faithful love, and willing not to destroy." ³ At this point, LORD, you may as well take my life from me, because it would be better for me to die than to live."

⁴ The LORD responded, "Is your anger a good thing?" ⁵ But Jonah went out from the city and sat down east of the city. There he made himself a hut and sat under it, in the shade, to see what would happen to the city.

⁶ Then the LORD God provided a shrub, and it grew up over Jonah, providing shade for his head and saving him from his misery. Jonah was very happy about the shrub. ⁷ But God provided a worm the next day at dawn, and it attacked the shrub so that it died. ⁸ Then as the sun rose God provided a dry east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint. He begged that he might die, saying, "It's better for me to die than to live."

⁹ God said to Jonah, “Is your anger about the shrub a good thing?” Jonah said, “Yes, my anger is good—even to the point of death!”

¹⁰ But the LORD said, “You ‘pitied’ the shrub, for which you didn’t work and which you didn’t raise; it grew in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ Yet for my part, can’t I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who can’t tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

MESSAGE: I know that was a long scripture reading, but I wanted you to hear the whole story again. It’s probably been a while since you thought of Jonah as more than the guy in the fish. AND HOW OFTEN DO WE GET TO TALK ABOUT THIS STORY? Very seldom. Since this story is in the canon of our Bible, there must be a reason. So, let’s dive in and discover what God is revealing to us.

The most obvious lesson we can learn is to follow when God calls us; in other words, obey. When a child is running into a busy street and we yell “Stop!”, we hope the child obeys since we know the circumstances if he doesn’t. Sometimes God can call us to do something that we don’t want to, but God knows why we should and what will happen if we don’t.

Another lesson we can learn from this story is the question of why the Prophet Jonah was so determined not to help the people of Nineveh. Biblical scholars believe that “Jonah in this legend

represents the staunch nationalistic, anti-universalistic attitude that seems at times to have characterized certain segments of Israelite religion and outlook.” (John H. Hayes)

It seems Jonah wanted to keep the loving and blessings of God away from some people. What do you think about this? Is that what Jesus teaches us?

I believe we are called to share with everyone, even when we think they don’t deserve it, even those who are hard to love. I’m sure you can think of a few. There’s no room for hate or violence to others in God’s kingdom. It’s not an easy task, yet God is calling us to obey.

Presently it seems that 40% of our country would disagree with us, as noticed on January 6. I think that 40% enjoy exclusiveness. They approve of only some people, not all. Was Jonah one of the “40%”?

Thinking of who we care about and who we don’t, I was drawn to some images. If we paint our world with only 2 colors, it would be monochrome, bland, and boring. I prefer canvases with bright colors that accompany each other. A song of only one note would be painful to our ears. A song of many notes brings life to dullness and joy to sadness. If we sing flat, the rest of the chorus helps lift us into tune. If we sing too sharp, the rest of the chorus is there to bring us back into harmony and music that stirs and comforts our souls.

Let’s all pray for a symphony of many instruments, choruses with many pitches, and paintings with many colors.

If we don't, God might rebuke us the way God did with Jonah, see verses 4-11. Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR TITHES AND OFFERINGS:

Gestures of gratitude are a demonstration that a blessing or benefit has been received. The gifts we give today are but tokens of the blessings of the new life we live in Christ. We bring our gifts with joy for they remind us of just how blessed we are to know this love that flows so generously from the spirit of God.

DEDICATION: May these gifts, given to these ministries of grace, be a blessing to friends and strangers, those like us and those not, those deserving and those not, for in this way the love of God reaches all of God's beloved. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Now may the One who is faithful to all be with us all as we depart these moments of worship. May we be a blessing to every place we go, until we gather again. Amen.



PRAYER LIST: We pray for the health and well-being of all affected by the pandemic and we especially pray for: Ginny Ganschinietz, Rich Schmitt, Donna Isselhard, Shari Hamilton, Becky Ballard, Pam (Belleville) Bierman, and **all the people of the United States of America and our leaders in Washington, D.C. and Springfield.**

**See next page for information about
the Annual Congregational Meeting
January 31, 2021
10:15 am**

ANNOUNCEMENTS: Congregational Annual Meeting for all members will be held Sunday, January 31 at 10:15 via Zoom. If you do not have the internet, you can still attend the meeting by way of your telephone.

Topic: *Annual Congregational Meeting 2021*

Time: *Jan 31, 2021 10:15 AM Central Time (US and Canada)*

To join this meeting using a landline telephone or a cell phone: Dial: **1-312-626-6799**

When prompted, enter this MEETING ID:

863 58581630

To mute or unmute your voice, press: (star) * 6

To join this meeting using a computer:

Click this

link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86358581630>

If prompted enter this MEETING ID:

863 5858 1630

If you are not familiar with getting on Zoom, call Christina at 217-553-2213 for further instructions.

BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED AND VOTED ON:

1. Approving the budget for 2021. A copy was included in the January newsletter.
2. Nominees for the Church Council include Chuck Kistler and Becky Riess. They are replacing Janice Petroff and Wayne Schlosser whose time on the council was complete. Ginny Ganschinietz and Tom Miller have agreed to another 2 year term.
3. The Council will be introducing some additions and some changes to the By-Laws. This will be the first reading and will be voted on at the Mid-Year Congregational Meeting.

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