

Homily for October 9th 2019

Wednesday 27th Week of Ordinary Time

This week we have been reading the Book of Jonah. Jonah was a man of irony. As he fled from the Lord in chapter 1 only to lament being banished from the Lord in chapter 2, so in chapter 2 he praised God for saving his life only to pray in chapter 4 for God to take his life.

What pleased God displeased Jonah and Jonah finds that the time-fuse does not work on the prophetic bomb that he planted in Nineveh.

As one commentator put it,

We see a prophet with a shocking disregard for human life and a bitter hatred toward those who had experienced mercy.¹

Jonah was not someone who desired for the coming of God's kingdom as expressed in the *Our Father*. This is made very clear by his prayer in chapter 4. Listen to these words again:

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.³ And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”²

Listen to his prayer:

- I said,
- I was still
- I fled
- I knew
- Take my life

Jonah is a cautionary tale that can all too easily happen in the life of religious people; we can become embittered - like the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son who complained:

Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.³

- I have been working

¹ Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995). [Amos, Obadiah, Jonah](#) (Vol. 19B, p. 272). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#). (1993). (Jon 4:2-4). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition](#). (1993). (Lk 15:29). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

- I have never disobeyed
- I might celebrate with my friends

Now here is the thing, both Jonah and the older son know the true character of the Father and they didn't like it.

Jonah in describing God as a gracious and merciful God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love is quoting from Exodus 34, when Moses returns to get the 10 Commandments for the 2nd Time

First, God is seen as a “gracious” God. This word communicates the attitude of the Lord toward those who are undeserving, thereby expressing benevolence in the ultimate sense. The next word used to describe God is the word “merciful”. This word is translated in many ways and can mean “loving” or “compassionate.” It also expresses the understanding and loving compassion of a mother to her child, hence the idea of understanding and loving favor. God is also described as “slow to anger”. This speaks to the patience and longsuffering of the Lord. Nineveh was the obvious recipient of this characteristic of the Lord. The next phrase used to describe God in this segment is “abounding in love”. In Hebrew it is *rab hesed*. The word *hesed* refers to the covenant love of God. This attribute expresses itself in redemption from sin. It encompasses the qualities of kindness, loyalty, and unfailing love. No one term in English adequately and accurately expresses the meaning of *hesed*. This covenant love issues itself in God's being “a God who relents from sending calamity”. Amazingly, Jonah did not use these words in praise to the Lord but as a tirade against him.⁴

The whole point of Jonah is that those who speak on behalf of God are to have the heart of God so that in us people can see the Kingdom of the Father coming into play in the experiences of our daily lives in this world.

There are so many today, who like the Ninevites don't know there left from their right, that is they are confused as to who God is and therefore who they are.

The Church is to be the community that is not angry at the world but wanting to invite in those who are discovering the gift and love that is in Jesus Christ. How clearly this was expressed in today's Collect:

Almighty ever living God, grant that we may always conform our will to yours and serve your majesty in sincerity of heart.

Sincere hearts know that God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. I pray I will increasingly embody such sincerity as your pastor so that we can take delight in praying for and living out the coming of God's kingdom in Calgary's Northwest

⁴ Smith, B. K., & Page, F. S. (1995). [Amos, Obadiah, Jonah](#) (Vol. 19B, pp. 273–274). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.