

## GRACE PERIOD

### Jonah 3:1-10 (Epiphany 3B)

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>‘Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.’ <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

<sup>6</sup> When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup>Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. <sup>8</sup>Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands.’ <sup>9</sup>Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.’

<sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

#### Introduction:

- A. Story of TOWARDS and AWAY.
- B. Recap the story of Jonah.
- C. How are we to come at the story of Jonah?
  1. From Jonah’s perspective (reluctant, angry, prejudiced, vindictive)
  2. From God’s perspective (universal God, merciful, gracious, “repenting”)
  3. From the Ninevite’s perspective (yet 40 days)
- D. How would we *live life differently* if we knew we only had 40 days?
- E. How would *we do church differently* if we knew we only had 40 days?
- F. In reality, all we have *is* 40 days (could be 40 years, or 40 minutes, or 40 seconds—40 in the Bible stands for a period of probation or trial—wandering Israelites—Moses on the mountain—Jesus in the wilderness)
- G. The Ninevites were living in a grace period. We are all living in a grace period. (credit card bills, loans, insurance—all have grace periods)

- H. Having a grace period means *we have been given a second chance to get life right*—whether in our own lives or in the church.)
1. Have you ever wished for a second chance?
  2. What would you do with a second chance at life?
  3. How would you react to the news that you got a second chance?
  4. Jonah 3 shows how gracious God is to give a grace period (Jonah & Ninevah)

### **GOD IS GIVING US A GRACE PERIOD RIGHT NOW!**

- A. God is a God of compassion, grace, and mercy. (also judgment)
- B. God is *long-suffering* and *patient*.
- C. The Bible gives many examples of people who failed, but were given a second chance.
1. Adam & Eve—failure to fruitfulness
  2. The human race during Noah’s time.
  3. Moses—from murderer to messiah.
  4. David—from manipulator to a man after God’s own heart.
  5. Jonah and the Ninevites.
  6. Peter—from a failure to a miracle-working preacher.
  7. Paul—from a persecutor to a missionary
- D. Just as God gave those people a grace period, God does for you and me.

### **WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE GRACE PERIOD GOD GIVES US.**

- A. *An opportunity doesn’t become a reality until we seize it.*
- B. How many of us live with the *regret of missed opportunities*? (“If only...”)
- C. God is giving us a grace period to follow Christ for salvation. (“*My spirit will not always strive*”—“*today is the day of salvation*”—“*now is the time of acceptance*”)
- D. Our church is living in a grace period. How we respond to the call of God now will determine our future or lack of future. (Forecasters predict that if the UMC continues on its current path, it will cease to exist in 60 years—some say less—many individual churches have a lot less—every year we close about a dozen UM churches in Missouri—we have been given a grace period to keep this church from becoming one of the sad statistics—a church that didn’t respond to the changes in the culture around it.)
- E. We have been given a second chance to *serve, minister and witness*.

- F. The person or church that has been given a second chance has a responsibility to God:
1. For obedience (we don't like that word!)
  2. For action
  3. For praise and worship
  4. For telling others
  5. For sharing the love and grace of God (as we have been given grace, we offer grace to others)
  6. Because Jonah and the Ninevites responded positively to God's gift of a grace period, a great revival ensued. (*We need a renewal and reformation today!*)

### **THE PROPER RESPONSE TO THE GIFT OF A SECOND CHANCE IS SIMPLE OBEDIENCE ("Jonah obeyed")**

#### **JONAH'S OBEDIENCE RESULTED IN A SIMPLE MESSAGE**

- A. Sometimes we complicate the simple message of God's love beyond belief.
- B. His message was that judgment was coming.
1. Not a very popular message.
  2. That doesn't diminish its truth.
- C. This sermon only had **8 words** (wouldn't you like a sermon like that!—Shortest sermon ever preached—hot summer day—country church with no A/C—everybody was wiping sweat and fanning themselves—preacher said "If you think it's hot here, just wait!")
- D. There was no hint that the Ninevites' repentance would accomplish anything.
- E. The Ninevites recognized that they had been given a grace period—it was an opportunity for them to experience God's compassion and mercy.
- F. *When we feel like the judgment of God is heavy upon us, it's not a time to despair—it's time to repent and experience the grace of God flow into our lives.*

### **THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S EXTENDING GRACE TO US IS THAT WE MIGHT BELIEVE ("The people of Ninevah believed God.")**

#### **THEIR BELIEF LED TO A SINCERE REPENTANCE**

#### **THEIR REPENTANCE LED TO THEIR DELIVERANCE**

**Conclusion:**

- A. We are living in the grace period right now.
  - 1. None of us knows how long our grace period will be.
  - 2. Our grace period is our opportunity for change—that's scary
  - 3. What changes do you need to make? What changes does our church need to make?
- B. God is offering us a second chance today. What will we do with it?
- C. Perhaps God is calling you to faith in Jesus. Maybe you are being called to become a member of this church. Could it be that you are being called to be the one who extends God's grace period to others? God is certainly calling our church to do a better job of reaching people for Christ. We too are called to proclaim "yet 40 days..."
- D. How can we do this? *It's by grace...period!*