

Pentecost 19, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Jonah 3 and 4

For the sermon text today, we turn back to the Old Testament lesson, as recorded in the book of Jonah, chapters 3 and 4. Keep it in hand and look it over as we proceed.

The Lord be with you! And let us pray:

Heavenly Father in days of old you called Jonah to be your servant, and in every generation there have been those you single out for the work of the Kingdom. And now in these last days you have called us, and singled us out, summoned us to be your servants in *this* place and time. Help us hear your voice Lord, and help us listen. Give us faith enough to follow where you lead, all the days of our lives; Jesus in your name, AMEN.

When I mention Jonah, probably the first thing you think about is the whale, the big fish that swallowed Jonah whole and, kept him down so to speak for three solid days. Jonah you may recall had been summoned by God to go preach to the people of Nineveh, that great city, and to tell them all to repent of their sins! Jonah had refused, he'd said No to God and instead had fled on a boat in the opposite direction. But you can't run from God. I know a lot of you are trying—we have pet sins we refuse to let go of, there are deeds of love and mercy waiting that we just never seem to have time for, God is calling us to a new and better life! And I know a lot us are trying to run from that, we're trying to run from God. It doesn't work. Just ask Jonah. God caught up with him, in a storm. The fish swallowed him, and kept him safe, till Jonah was at last ready to hear the voice of God, and listen, and obey.

Which he did, in chapter 3. Unfortunately there's also a chapter 4 in this book, and that's what concerns us today, you see Jonah had this great life-changing experience. The whole thing about being swallowed by a fish and then being spit up on shore, it was you know a life changing moment! "God I'm your man now!" said Jonah. "Lord I'm ready to go!"—and he was. Till his favorite shade tree died, in v. 7, and then the air conditioning went out, and Jonah got hot and uncomfortable one sultry summer afternoon. Trivial stuff, really, it is, but you see the effect it had on Jonah—the anger and the despair in v 9, the childish display of selfish self-centeredness

throughout ch. 4. Bottom line, Jonah had this life changing experience, only he really didn't change. Ok? Jonah had this great life-changing experience, only he really didn't change—scratch the surface and see! Beneath an occasionally pious exterior, the Jonah of chapter 4 still looks an awful lot like the Jonah of chapter 1.

Others are literally in that same boat, or it seems to me. This of course is Shipwreck Sunday, the day we here at Good Hope and over at St Paul as well remember the story of the Wreck of the Famous Dove. For those of you who don't know—can't be too many of you, but for those who really do not know—The Dove was the ship 177 years ago, that brought to this country the ancestors of a great many people who live in Arlington and Jenera today. And that ship The Dove very nearly sank, and your great grandparents very nearly drowned. They didn't, by the grace of God, they made it to shore, and there's that best loved moment in the entire story of The Dove, when in the midst of the storm at sea little Margaret began to sing A Mighty Fortress is our God. To sing that song then, when you thought you were going to die; to then live to see a new day, in fact to reach shore safe and sound, a new life in a new land—well it's a lot like Jonah, isn't it? Rescued from death at sea by God Himself, brought to shore safe and secure, it was a life-changing moment. For our ancestors the passengers of The Dove, Sept 17 1831 was plainly a life-changing day.

But how much did they really change? In their lives too—if you were to read *the next chapter*, so to speak—what would you find? Truly changed people? Or people who could still get mad at little things, people who could still be selfish and self-centered and rude and all the rest. People who could gossip and carry a grudge, people who could be honest, when they had to be, but knew how to be dishonest when it worked better that way, people in short who were still sinners at heart. After this great life-changing moment at sea, how changed were these people really? Like Jonah, our ancestors coming off the Dove could be pious one moment, and then could backslide into sin the next.

And so can we. So can we, tell me, how many times has God spoken to your heart, how many

times have you known Him to be at work in your life? How many times here in this place have you resolved to turn life over to the Lord and hand Him control and how many times. How many times did you end up backsliding into sin instead. Almost as many as me, I imagine. The sad fact is, for Christians many of us in chapter 4 of our lives already, we look and act and sound as though we were still stuck in chapter 1. When it comes to faith and actually following after Jesus every day, well. Honestly? We just don't seem to change very much.

But the Good News is, God doesn't really change either. God who is the same yesterday today and forever, God does not change either—and His message for us is still love and forgiveness and life made clean and new, all through the cross of Jesus Christ who died and rose again. Jesus is and remains the one and only Son of God, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, to die on a cross then rise again on the 3rd day. The sin in your life and mine is tough—it has a hold of us and does not want to let go. Well God is tough too—Jesus Christ was tougher than death and tougher than the grave—He doesn't want to let go either. And He won't. As tightly as sin wants to cling to us, and as deeply engrained as some of our habits are—Jesus holds us tighter. His love goes deeper, and lasts longer. And He is here one more time today, with an offer that will change your life forever. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God, and bestows on them the life-giving, life-changing Holy Spirit, and He opens to us all the Father's home in heaven. We've heard this before, I know—and we've maybe been changed a little—now hear it again, wherever you are in life, and may God now be the one to control you, and change you, and finish the story for you. So may it be for us all, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN.