

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 8th 2013

Today's scripture readings are some of my favorites and they contrast God's will and our own will. In the book of Jonah, God instructs Jonah (a second time) to go to the city of Nineveh and tell the people that God is unhappy with them and going to destroy them. The psalmist proclaims, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord". In Luke, Jesus comes to the village of Mary and Martha. Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens and Martha gets busy serving. Martha tells Jesus to tell her lazy, no good sister to get up and help her with the serving. And Jesus responds (kindly) that Martha should not worry so much and Mary has chosen the right thing.

The Martha-Mary story is a hard one for me as I so identify with Martha. Who has time to sit and listen? We have to be busy.

However, Jonah is the scripture reading that jumps out at me today. God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach his message. Jonah goes and tells the Ninevites that God is going to destroy their wicked city in 40 days. The people, from the king on down, fast and repent and call to God for forgiveness. And God forgives them.

Does anyone remember the late famous commentator, Paul Harvey? "And now for the rest of the story."

Our story began with Jonah as a student at Prophet State University. Training to be a prophet to Israel. However, God has other plans. Jonah's response to God's plan is to hop a freighter to Tarshish. I've always found the notion that Jonah thought he could run and hide from God kind of humorous. Then comes the violent storm at sea, walking the plank, swallowed by a giant fish and nasty fish vomit.

And that's where our story begins. God tells Jonah (a second time) to go to Nineveh and preach his message. Jonah obeys, the people repent and God forgives.

But wait, there's more. You would think Jonah would be happy. His preaching has converted an entire city. But no, Jonah is furious. The Ninevites are a horrible people. God should not be sparing them. They deserve to die. God's plan does not fit into Jonah's plan. God kindly shows Jonah the error of his ways.

Recently I went with my brother to the city of Jakarta to attend my nephew's wedding. Further from home than I have ever been. A Christian boy going to a Muslim wedding in a Muslim city in a Muslim country. I worried about how I would represent Christ. I wondered what they would think of me. I started rehearsing in my mind what I would say to those who inquired about my faith. Preparing arguments for any challenges. I worried about rejection. Then it stuck me. This is not about me. This is about God's plan. God is more interested in my heart than what I do. If I simply have a servant's heart and open myself to God's will and am obedient, that will be enough. The trip was the trip of a life time and my nephew married a beautiful young lady and was received into a loving, welcoming family.

It's normal to want to be in control and know where God is taking us. We want God's plan to match our plan. That said, sometimes I think God has to short circuit our plans for our own benefit. Through Jesus, we know that God is good and God loves us. With that knowledge, we can endure a seemingly painful change in our plans and still be joyful, hopeful and open to God's plan.

My prayer today is for those of us who prefer our plan to God's plan. That we would have a heart open to God's will and trust boldly.

Post script: This is Dan O'Reilly's last reflection with the Online Ministries' Daily Reflection site. His words here are especially poignant as he leaves Creighton to be open to God's plan for himself and his family. We are very grateful to Dan for his many, many years as a faithful writer in this ministry. We wish Dan all the best in this new journey ahead.

Dan O'Reilly