

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Feb 25th 2015

In today's first reading we hear that Jonah's preaching to the people of Nineveh elicited an immediate and complete response of repentance - men and women turning from their evil ways - a movement led by the king himself! I find it hard to believe that the threat of total destruction in forty days provided sufficient motivation. It certainly isn't enough in our day. The threat of the approaching end times, or any threat of catastrophe, doesn't seem to change minds and hearts. These threats only increase the numbers of "preppers" - folks who are stockpiling supplies, food and water, and preparing for self-sufficiency.

I believe Jonah had more to his message - and if not, Jesus certainly did. And it is what many of us need to hear this Lent. I imagine Jonah's preaching reminded the people of who they were - the goodness and courage that is within each of them; the freedom they each have to be a blessing to each other rather than a curse; that different choices will allow them to thrive as a culture, to flourish as a great city. I think he reminded them that everything that they have - their loved ones, their food and shelter, their hopes and dreams, their fortunes and their tragedies, their very lives - has been given to them by a generous Creator. A Creator who is Goodness itself - constantly calling us home to our true self in the Divine Embrace, continually leading us to Abundant Joy.

In my ministry I hear more distress and anguish not from sin per se, but rather from folks making choices that disappoint others; not living up to the expectations of others. I hear students struggling with taking a course of studies or choosing a career that they believe will deeply disappoint parents. I hear people making good choices - decisions made with careful deliberation, consultation and prayer - and then struggling with how this choice disappointed a significant other, a boss, a colleague. Easy for us to recognize these sorrows, while not easily healed.

I wonder if we suffer more from the lies we believe than the lies we tell. The lie we believe that we are fundamentally flawed, defective in some essential way. We see others as more free, more wise, more prayerful, more courageous. We fear the disapproval of others, not the wrath of God, forgetting that these very limitations and faults, by which others judge us so harshly, are given us for our wholeness and holiness!! If we don't perceive this, we turn against ourselves in self-hatred, or against others in judgment and hostility. It is easy to recognize the sin around us - to see the destruction of corporate greed, terrorism and mass killings, pornography and human trafficking. It's harder to recognize that the lies we believe about ourselves contribute to this.

Last week we heard the words "repent and believe the good news," while ashes were placed on our forehead. Repent of self-judgment; believe the depth of your goodness!

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