

Pastor Roy's Sermon from September 24, 2017

Jonah—children's message. Why might Jonah not want to go talk to the people who had invaded his country?

Jonah's people, the northern kingdom of Israel, had enemies, the Assyrians from Nineveh. They had invaded, brutally treated, and crushed the Israelites. Some were uprooted and sent into exile where they were isolated and lived out their years with foreign people in a foreign land. Their sister people, the Jews (southern tribes) were more fortunate. When the Babylonians invaded and took the southern tribes into exile, they allowed them to live together and remember their identity and vision of God. They built synagogues for teaching their faith. The book of Jonah was probably written in a synagogue to challenge the Jews with the message that they live to proclaim God's mercy, and Gentiles are invited to faith also. Even if those Gentiles have done horrible things, even if they are feared, hated, and despised. After the exile in Babylon and Persia, the Greeks would come, the Romans would come, and there was in the background of the Jews' faith, this seed of forgiving the enemy, inviting them to something new—allowing for an 11th hour conversion to Grace.

Who are your enemies? What are your enemies? What are your frustrations, struggles? Finances and storms can be enemies. Political rivals. Neighbors that have different ways. People of different races, cultures, and religions which we fear.

Grace can feel like an injustice! Jonah had good reason for the Ninevites to be punished and destroyed. It is hard to show and pray grace for those we view as enemies or a threat. We want justice for *our* causes. Things we feel strongly about. Things that make perfect sense from our own perspective! But we don't naturally think about justice for those with whom we disagree, or for those who have followed a different path. Jesus' parable speaks similarly.

The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner goes out early to hire with the usual wage, laborers for his vineyard. 9:00—idle workers, you also go into the vineyard, I will pay whatever is right. Again at noon. Again at 3. Again at 5. Why the idleness? Nobody hired us? Go into my vineyard! Then he pays them all the same--ending with the first hired who are disappointed after they put in so much more work, only to get the same payment. In the end, this kingdom of heaven like the landowner asks. . . "Are you envious because I am generous?"

The Kingdom of heaven in this parable is grace—not equal pay for equal work, it is equal pay for any work. Just showing up brings the reward. The workers willing to work are granted the day's pay. We resist grace when we live in a world full of payments and earnings. You get what you deserve. But in this parable, everyone at the end of the day gets a living wage.

Jesus' parable invites us to avoid passing judgment on who is valuable and who is not, but to value all equally as all are equally valued by God's mercy, by the elements of creation--the sun, the rain, and the breath of life.

We often think of judgment and payment. Those who have been working through the heat of the day are more valuable than those who seem to just show up for the reward, the benefit, the good times. Some work hard, some seem to have it easy. Some surrender all to the community, others seem to mainly expect and receive from the community. Some are happy—appear to live lives of ease, some struggle with pain, even profound depression. Some have plenty of resources, others lack. What's the deal? What's our answer? Is it because some are more deserving of others, and we don't need to worry about those who suffer? Or does it just not work that way. . .and suffering as well as blessing is of a more random nature. We hate random things. We love predictability.

These parables, Jonah and the landowner, challenge us to reconsider our instincts, to ponder the unpredictable but free grace at work all around us. Perhaps the simplest question which grows out of them is this question which the kingdom asks, the universe asks, which God asks is "Are you envious because I am generous? That is the question for Jonah and the hard working day workers.

Another question is, "In what new way can we participate in the grace at work all around us?" It begins with our attitudes, continues with readiness for something new, and finally our participation in this grace which is free to all. Thanks be to God.