

16th Sunday after Pentecost

September 20, 2020

Collect: GRANT US, Lord not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons: Jonah 3:10-4:11

Psalm 145:1-8

Philippians 1:21-30

Matthew 20:1-16

Sermon: The Old Testament lesson is a story about God giving the prophet Jonah a task, he is to go to the city of Nineveh and deliver a message. God is angry that the city is such a wicked place, and he wants Jonah to go there and denounce it. God's intention is to warn the people that because he sees their wickedness everywhere, he is going to destroy the town and its' people.

Jonah decides he won't do this, so he disobeys God and goes to Joppa. There he takes a boat to Tarshish thinking he can hide from and be out of the reach of God.

God though sees and knows that Jonah is trying to evade him. So, he unleashes a hurricane while Jonah is on the sea. The sea is so rough that it threatens to break up the boat. The sailors are afraid and cry out to **their** gods for help. They also began to throw things overboard to lighten the load of the boat. Meanwhile, Jonah is below deck asleep. In a frenzy, the boat's captain wakes Jonah and tells him to call oh his god in hopes he will spare the lives of the crew and passengers.

The sailors cast lots to see who was to blame for the situation they were in. They planned to toss the offender overboard in hopes that it would appease the gods and dismiss the hurricane. It appeared that Jonah was to blame.

Now Jonah had already told the crew he was a Hebrew and that he was trying to escape the Lord and what he had been told to do. The storm grew worse and worse. Jonah told the crew that it was his fault and they should throw him overboard so that the hurricane would cease and the seas would become calm. They did and the sea stopped raging.

The story goes on to tell that while Jonah was in the sea, he was swallowed by a large fish. After three days, the fish spit him out on dry land. God again spoke to Jonah telling him to go to Nineveh and tell them about the destruction God had planned for them.

The people of Nineveh believed Jonah and God's words. They all, including the king, put on sackcloth (a sign of anguish and mourning), fasted and called on the Lord with all their might. They repented and changed their wicked ways.

God saw what they had done and changed his mind. He would not deliver on them the disaster he had planned.

Jonah grew angry with God. When God asked him why was he angry, Jonah said, "I knew you were a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger; abounding in steadfast love, not desiring to punish but to offer forgiveness." That's why I didn't want to take the message of destruction to Nineveh.

Meanwhile Jonah had gone outside the city to sit and watch what he thought would be the destruction of the city. It was hot and the Lord allowed a bush to grow and give Jonah shade. However, in the morning the bush withered and Jonah sat with the sun beating down on him. The heat was so intense that Jonah prayed for death

God asked Jonah, "Are you so angry that the bush has died that you want to die?" Jonah answered, "Yes!" God then told Jonah that he had nothing to do with the growing of the plant or its' withering, but yet he felt sorrow for it.

Imagine looking squarely at Jonah and saying, “If you can feel sorrow for the bush, why can’t I feel sorry for the people of Nineveh?”

Jonah had really wanted to see Nineveh go up in flames and when it didn’t happen, he was disappointed. He felt duped. After all, when he first received the word, he may have thought God wouldn’t do something like that. So, he tried to make himself unavailable for God’s use.

God showed Jonah he was capable not only of changing his mind, but also giving second chances.

In the Gospel Jesus is teaching his disciple about what the kingdom of Heaven (God’s realm, rule) is like. He tells them the story of a landowner who hires day laborers to work in his vineyard.

He went out early one morning around 6 a.m. and hired some laborers promising them the usual daily wage. At 9 a.m. he was in the market place and saw some idle men, he hired them and promised them a fair wage if they would work in the vineyard, at noon and 3 p.m. he hired some more laborers and promised them the same wage agreement. At 5 p.m., an hour before sunset he went to the market place and saw a group of men standing around, when asked why they weren’t working. The reply was that no one had hired them. The landowner told them to go and work in his vineyard.

At the end of day when it was time to pay the laborers, the landowner paid the last workers first and the first workers last. All received a full day's pay. This angered the first group of men hired at 6 a.m. they had worked the longest and thought they should have been paid more than the last group hired at 5 p.m. They approached the landowner and expressed their anger; they had worked all day in the scorching heat and yet he paid the men who worked only one hour the same. It was unfair!

The landowner reminded them that they had agreed to the usual daily wage when he first approached them. He had given them what he promised and he reminded them that he could choose to pay others whatever he wanted.

The message here is that in God’s kingdom we will all be treated and rewarded the same. So, it is never too late to evangelize, telling of God’s goodness. It is never too late to try to get people to change bad behavior and

start doing good. It is never too late for a sinner to repent, even on his/her death bed.

God doesn't have a time clock for us to punch/clock in. He simply rejoices that we are working and spreading his word and love through our actions.

The story of Jonah tells us we can't hide from God and if there is something, he wants you to do, he'll create the opportunity and motivation for you to do it.

I think if we look over our lives there are things that have been on our minds to do, but we put them off. Yet you continue to get a nudge or hear a small voice telling you to do it. You keep putting it off. But it won't be forgotten. Perhaps you think it is too difficult, maybe you don't want to approach that person, or maybe you want more time to really think about and look it over. Can you remember the relief when you've finally done it?

We are the laborers at work in God's vineyard, the world. Regardless of how much time we put in, we will all receive an equal measure of God's love and mercy! Amen.

Rev. Lionel

