



Artwork credit: Florida Center for Instructional Technology

## “Mr. Objection”

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Saturday and Sunday, September 23-24, 2017  
All Services  
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Jonah 3:10-4:11; Matthew 20:1-16

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Let me begin by saying that I believe that God is absolutely able to create a fish SO large as to be able to swallow an entire adult human being, whole. I also believe that God is able to make certain that human being can survive in that fish's digestive tract for three days, relatively unharmed. Further, that fish could *then* spit up that human out onto a river bank. And finally, once that person is cleaned up from whatever was floating around there in the fish's stomach, that person would then be able to roam the streets of a major city, proclaiming the wrath that God was about to be inflicted upon those doomed urban dwellers.

I believe that God is **absolutely** able to do all that. I *also* believe, this could just be a story, a morality tale, much like *Aesop's Tales*. The interpretation of this book has been the point of contention for many individuals, across the ages. For me, though, it does not matter all that much, one way or the other. Over the years, at various times, I have argued for *both* ways: both that this was a factual event, or that it is an amazing morality lesson.

What has apparently **Not** bothered the overwhelming majority of people about this story of Jonah, and that **has** bothered me, is that Jonah, with all his objections about serving God, is that in my simple and not so humble opinion, *Jonah* comes across as a total and complete **jerk**.

To better understand that, we need to take a quick look at the story as a whole. Jonah is this guy to whom God issues a call:

<sup>2</sup> "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." (Jonah 1:2 NRSV)

(Nineveh happens to be one of the major cities of the Assyrians, one of those "frenemy" places) (they tend to be more enemy than friend, but all we really need to know is that Jonah does *Not* Care For them).

Jonah responds to God's command by heading to the port of Joppa, over on the Mediterranean coast, and finding the first ship going **West**, which is the exact *opposite* direction of Nineveh.

Jonah hops on the boat and quickly falls asleep. While asleep, a storm kicks blows in. Jonah wakes up and is informed of the situation. Then, in an apparent act of *contrition*, Jonah confesses that **he** is the cause of the storm, because he is running away *from* the LORD. After a vain attempt to outrun the storm, at **Jonah's** urging, the sailors toss him overboard. The storm abates, the sailors are safe and give thanks to God.

God, however, as it turns out, has a bit of a wicked sense of humor, and sends one of the first known underwater human transport systems ever recorded to pick Jonah up. This is otherwise known as a VBF: a Very Big Fish.

While in his new aquatic home, Jonah has a change of heart, and a bit grudgingly, agrees to proclaim God's message. That wonderful prayer (we could even call it a psalm) happens in chapter 2 (the entire book is really short, it'll take you ten minutes to read the whole thing. Look it up when you get home).

So, Jonah is vomited up onto the banks of the Tigris River, in modern day Iraq. Hopefully, *presumably*, now bleached white by the stomach acids, Jonah cleans himself off, marches about a third of the way into the city, and boldly proclaims:

*"Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"* (Jonah 3:4 NRSV)

Jonah then marches back out of Nineveh, sets up tent, and sits back to enjoy the impending destruction of this people he Really Does Not Like. He wants to see those Assyrians *burn*.

The kicker *here*, though, is that, much to Jonah's *chagrin*, the people of Nineveh **repent**, including the king. So, judgement is averted. One **might** think that Jonah would be overjoyed at these events; not only are there now *more* believers in the Lord God Almighty, but *lives* are saved. Yet, what did we hear instead?

*"O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I **knew** that you are a gracious God and merciful, **slow** to anger, and **abounding** in steadfast love, and ready to **relent** from punishing. <sup>3</sup> And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."*

Wait, let me get this straight: there are **more** believes in LGA; Death and destruction are **avoided**; people get a **second chance** at life; and this yahoo Jonah is **ticked off**?

### WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS GUY?

I would **never** . . . Ah. . . no, I have to admit that I **know** that am the kind of guy, who, when driving at ten miles over the speed limit, and I see some yutz come ripping up behind me, trying to drive right up my tail pipe - because obviously this person is *Way more* important than I am - I know that if I *don't* move out of his way at the instant I am able to go into the right lane, he'll zip into that space and attempt to rip past me on the right, pull back in front of me, and roar off down the road. To which I would be hard pressed to **Not** respond by waving to him, not using all of my fingers; which is bad enough on its own, and it's really not good when I'm in uniform.

I am **not** a nice **driver**. I'm working on being better. But to be honest, I've been working at it for twenty years and I'm not getting very far. For that matter, I'm not much of a nice **person**: I know I have a swift temper, an acid tongue, and I can hold a *grudge*.

I tend to be **far** too much like those vineyard workers who got all ticked off because they were paid *exactly* what they agreed to work for, but they were upset that those folks who only worked for one hour got paid a full day's wage, too.

Let me ask, where are you, on that scale? Who are you more like? The over generous vineyard owner, who paid a full day's wage to those who worked only one hour? Or are you

like the all-day workers, who grumbled because they were paid exactly what they agreed to, even though everybody got the same wage, regardless of how long they worked?

I think **one** of the reasons I struggle so much with the book of Jonah is that I'm too much *like* him. I avoided my call to ministry for a *long* time. I tend to get way *too* angry at those folks who don't see ministry in the same vein as I do, because *Of Course* my vision for the congregation is the correct one!

I know that I am **not** a nice person. Oh, but you know what? Neither are any of you. I say that because St. Paul wrote in the letter to the Romans:

*ALL of us have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)*

That really bites. *None* of us are good enough. **All** of us are under that same word of condemnation that Jonah gave to Nineveh:

*forty days more, and be overthrown!*

We **all** need to fall on our knees before God, *before one another*, and confess the wrongs we have done, the arrogance we hold onto, that righteous indignation we cherish. All of us need to stop our objections to God, bow down before the Almighty, confess our sins, our inadequacies our faults, our failings, our good intentions that all too often end up causing more harm than helping.

We all need to learn to work together, to learn to support one another, to disagree civilly, to be able to come to a mutual agreement in ALL things.

Jonah's a jerk. And so am I. Christ forgives us all. Regardless.

Amen.

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