

Fifth Sunday in Lent - April 6, 2025

1 Kings 10:1–10, 13; Psalm 131:1–3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10; Luke 11:27–32

“Jonah’s sign”

1. Imagine your reaction if you heard that a preacher from rural Indiana has become famous speaking about loving one another, and repentance from our sins and a return to God
 - a. Maybe from a little funky town like New Harmony, on the Wabash River, preaching and teaching about equity and inclusion, and healing hundreds of people, but his message gets him sideways with the governor’s executive orders against DEI, and the FBI has quietly started a file on him
 - b. And the Evansville CBS affiliate does a profile and the national feed picks it up
 - c. And his interviews on a religious podcast and a political podcast go viral
 - d. And there is talk that he’s going to lead a march on Washington DC, so maybe it’s true that some people are trying to recruit him to run for office
 - e. Some think he’s divisive – because he’s saying people are not doing what God is asking of us
 - f. Some think he’s power hungry – because his crowds get bigger and bigger
 - g. But some argue he’s down to earth – because he leads an unassuming lifestyle
 - h. And some say that his focus isn’t the powerful, but those who are being left behind by everyone else’s prosperity.
 - i. Would you tune in? Or show up at one of his speeches?
 - j. Would you take a leave of absence and start following him as he spoke around the state?
2. I’ve heard people wonder aloud about what they would do if Jesus were to appear among us here and now, not 2,000 years ago. They wonder how their reaction would be similar or different to what we read in the gospel
 - a. We probably would have reacted like the people 2,000 years ago
 - b. Today’s passage comes after some time in Jesus’ ministry, and he’s cranky
 - i. No matter what Jesus does, there are obstacles and in general a resistance to his message
 - ii. He just wants people to hear the Word of God and keep it, obey it.
 - iii. But, apparently they weren’t. He calls them an evil generation.
 - iv. That’s not just a few people. It’s an entire generation!
 - c. He speaks of biblical figures to them, foreigners no less, who had heard and believed the word from God
 - i. The Queen of the South (of Sheba) came hundreds of miles to learn from Solomon more willingly than this generation would walk across town and listen to what Jesus had to say!
 - ii. They want a sign, proof, he says. Proof!! The only proof they’ll get is the sign of Jonah. The Ninevites who repented after Jonah preached will judge you
 - d. Both of those references are a bit obscure perhaps to us, but would have been familiar to the original audience.
 - i. What they have in common is that both the Queen and the people of Nineveh were outsiders (one very rich, the other very ordinary but sworn

- enemies of the Israelites), and against all odds they listened to God's word (through Solomon / Jonah)
 - ii. And they did what God wanted them to do.
 - e. Jesus implies that the proof the people wanted was right there, hidden in plain sight
 - i. Jesus was a bigger deal than Jonah, a bigger deal than Solomon, and they couldn't see it
 - ii. He was trying to guide them back to God, but they were hung up with all sorts of reasons not to follow him
 - iii. Jesus' original audience would have understood the "sign of Jonah" as the incredible turnaround of SOME unlikely people (like Ninevites)
 - iv. Additionally we, the subsequent readers of this passage, can see another layer on that "sign of Jonah" because we know that Jesus (like Jonah) would spend some time (3 days) hidden and as good as dead (Jonah in the great fish, Jesus dead in the tomb) only to come back to life
- 3. The theme for this Lent has been things which are hidden or secret, and this passage pushes us to think of what are the ways God is speaking to us which are hiding in plain sight
 - a. Maybe it's that friend who is with us in a 12-step recovery group, whose life story and wisdom are a continuing source of strength for us.
 - b. Maybe it's that faithful church member who is always working behind the scenes to show Christ's love caring for neighbors and strangers alike
 - c. God speaks through them,
 - i. calling us to set aside our despair and feel God's hope
 - ii. calling us to live with a servant's heart
 - d. And God speaks through us too
 - i. When we admit getting it wrong and saying "I'm sorry"
 - ii. When we grieve together
 - iii. When we go out on a limb for someone
 - iv. When we fight systems of oppression
 - e. The sign of Jonah is that word of God hiding in plain sight, sometimes hidden even from ourselves
 - i. because we should not forget that Jonah was a prophet in spite of himself, in spite of being an enemy of the Ninevites
 - ii. hiding even within Jonah, in spite of his own barriers, God's word of love and call for repentance was bigger than all his hesitation.
 - iii. Love wins, in all the ways, in all the circumstances
 - iv. But coming so close to God's love, also call us to repentance, to get on the same page with God
- 4. With the daring curiosity of the Queen of the South and the wisdom of Solomon, with the hesitation of Jonah and the unexpected repentance of the Ninevites, with the reluctance of the crowd and Jesus' unstoppable love, we are guided into reconnecting with God, and to hear and live by the word of God in community.