



grow. pray. serve.

Reveille UMC Weekly Guide

January 15-21, 2018

**Sermon by Guest Preacher Dr. Joel LeMon:
"Jonah and the Whale"**

Notes from sermon on 1/14:

Prayer requests:

Family Focus Question (before sermon):

What was Jonah really afraid of when he initially refused to go to Ninevah?

3 Questions for small groups (after sermon):

What does it mean for God to pursue us as God did Jonah?

What does this say about God?

What does it say about us?

Monday, January 15: Read Jonah 3:1-4

In every reading this week, we begin in the middle of the story...missing what came before and not yet hearing how everything turns out. What we do catch is something amazing: people dropping everything and following God. This is the moment that seems to matter the most - the point of surrender and saying "yes" to God, no matter what came before, no matter what is happening at the time.

In today's scripture passage, we actually know much of the "before" because it's one of the most famous stories in the Bible - the story known worldwide as "Jonah and the Whale" in which Jonah flees from God after being given the directive to preach repentance to the city of Ninevah and is ultimately swallowed by a great fish for three days. Knowing this backstory gives much greater weight to today's opening words, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a *second* time..." and allows us to better understand the magnitude of courage it took for Jonah to walk through an immense foreign city proclaiming its impending doom. Without the backstory, however, we can still read the words, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah....so Jonah set out..." Is this how we respond to the word of God in our lives? Does it matter what our "backstory" is in order to be a faithful servant to God...even if we've said "no" to God before?

Tuesday, January 16: Read Jonah 3:5-10

Today's passage telling of an entire city instantly and completely repenting would be an amazing story on its own, at any time. When we learn of Ninevah's backstory, however, it becomes all the more incredible, for several reasons. The city of Ninevah was the capital of the dreaded Assyrian Empire, the ancient conquerors of much of the Fertile Crescent, known for their use of iron weapons and terrifying practice of nailing the skins of their conquered victims onto city walls. Now we see why Jonah ran. Repeatedly in the Old Testament we read pleas for Assyria's destruction and cries of victory when Israel's enemies are (sometimes ruthlessly) vanquished. But today, we read of repentance, grace, and forgiveness...for Ninevah, the mortal enemies of the very people who scribed, preserved, and worshipped these very words. Incredible. If we read ahead, we can see how difficult God's grace was for Jonah to accept, just as it may be for us today to accept God's grace and forgiveness for regimes and cultures we consider unworthy of it. Do we believe all people are deserving of God's forgiveness? Do we believe all people are capable of turning their lives around and saying "yes" to God? Do we believe we are?

Wednesday, January 17: Read Mark 1:14-20

Don't we wish we knew more of the backstory of many of the characters in today's gospel reading, and could stick around to see the reaction of James and John's father Zebedee or any of the disciples' families when they simply dropped everything and followed Jesus! We know next to nothing about these men's personal lives, other than they were gainfully employed and busy when Jesus found them and told them, "the time is fulfilled, repent." None of this seems to matter for the story, however- only the moment, which consisted of instant and complete surrender to Christ. How many times do we let our own past and concerns for the future prevent us from instant and complete obedience to God? When have we been called to respond, but let the moment pass because we were busy, worried about the details, or decided to impose our own timing on God's plan? What if we let God worry about the "after"?

Thursday, January 18: Read I Corinthians 7:29-31

The urgency of timing permeates this passage from Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth: the time is *now*, so stop worrying about everything else. Paul wrote in a time when the return of Christ seemed imminent, though Jesus himself warned that none of us will ever know the exact moment of his return. What if we lived every day as if it could be the one in which Christ came back? Are we where we want to be? Doing what we want to be caught doing? The incredible news is that we don't have to make a long-term plan to become the holy, clean, and transformed disciples of Christ. Right now....today...we can drop what we are doing, repent, and follow Christ and his plan for our lives. *What is God calling you to drop? What sins and regrets do you need to hand over to God? What tug at your heart do you need to answer?*

Friday, January 19: Read Psalm 62:5-12

After reading today's passage from Psalm 62 today, let us find a quiet space and practice scriptural meditation and prayer, using the opening words of today's scripture, "For God alone my soul waits in silence..." as our focus. The psalmist beautifully captures the theme of presence and complete surrender from this week's scriptures. When we wait on God alone, our timing becomes God's timing. When we place our hope only in God, our plans become God's plans. As we breathe out, we let go of our sins, regrets, mistakes, distractions, and misled priorities. As we breathe in, we inhale God's love, forgiveness, wisdom, power, protection, and deliverance...transforming us and healing us...right here; right now.

Saturday, January 20: SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION: Psalm 62:5

"For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him."

Sunday, January 21: Let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship in praying our Prayer of Common Confession: *Forgiving God, we repent of all the ways we turn from you. You call, but we do not listen; you show us your path, but we prefer our own way. Forgive us, heal us, and lead us back to you, that we might show mercy to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*