

September 29, 2019

Called
God Calls Jonah
Jonah 1:1-3

Opening words: This is the definition of called: (according to CRU, formally Campus Crusade for Christ) Calling, is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion, dynamism, and direction lived out as a response to his summons and service. That definition reminds me of my calling. Personally, I have never questioned my calling. It is my greatest resource. I am both humbled and proud that God called me, with my unique combination of strengths and weaknesses. My calling is a big part of my personal identity. Daily, I am reminded I am paid by this congregation and serve a United Methodist congregation, but I work for God. Let me say this clearly. You don't want a minister who hasn't been called.

In this sermon series we are looking at Old Testament characters who God called. Two weeks ago, we looked at Abraham's call. In his story we talked about purpose. Last week, we looked at Samuel's call. In his story we talked about positioning ourselves to hear God. Today, we look at Jonah's call. He has been called "The Reluctant Prophet." In his story we find the themes of faithfulness and evangelism. Our scripture reading for today is Jonah 1:1-3. Let me call the message *God Calls Jonah*.

Jonah 1:1-3 The word of the LORD came to Jonah, son of Amittai: ²"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

³ But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

Luis Palau (born 1934) is an international Christian evangelist, who lives near Portland, Oregon. He once said, "*Evangelism is not an option for the Christian life.*" The greatest evangelists live the gospel. Are you living the gospel? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the book of Jonah. He is one of the twelve Minor Prophets. They are not minor because they are not important, they are minor because their books are brief. Tradition tells us Jonah was written by the prophet, himself. The date it was written is approximately 600 BC. One of the most intriguing elements of this Old Testament book are the New Testament undertones. For example, the name Jonah means "dove," the New Testament symbol of the Holy Spirit. Also, Jonah was saved by a great fish, which is the New Testament symbol of the Christian faith. However, what is important to us today is the basic storyline. Everyone knows the story of Jonah.

His calling comes in the very first verse of the book, "*The word of the Lord came to Jonah.*" That was a common phrase, when the prophets were called. It is found in other places in the Old Testament as well. Never forget, prophets were called to speak on behalf of God, not predict future events. The problem is not that Jonah doesn't understand his calling, but that the word Jonah received was clear and exact. The problem was Jonah didn't want to deliver the divine message. God tells him to go to Nineveh and preach a message of repentance. That is the last thing Jonah wanted to do. This is the truth, he really didn't care for the Ninevites and he wanted them to perish. You know the story, Jonah headed to the coastal town of Joppa and bought a ticket to take him to Tarshish. Geography is important in this story. The two cities, Nineveh and Tarshish, represent the opposite ends of the commercial world in ancient times. Nineveh was located on the Tigris River in modern day Assyria and Tarshish was located on the coast in modern day southwestern Spain. Jonah may have been a prophet, but his theology was poor. Jonah forgot it is impossible to run away from God. The Almighty is omnipresent. If you believe God is everywhere say, "**Amen!**" However, there is more to the story than God's omnipresence. There is also the human factor.

The two great holidays in the Christian faith are Christmas and Easter. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God. At Easter, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. The third great holiday in the Christian faith is Pentecost. You remember the story. It is fifty days after the Passover. The Jews are celebrating the festival of the harvest. We call it Thanksgiving. They called it Pentecost. They don't have a clue what is about to happen. As instructed by Jesus, the disciples are still in Jerusalem. Without warning, the wind begins to blow, and the Holy Spirit is unleashed on the believers. Before it is over the believers are speaking in a foreign tongue, and the disciples are transformed. No longer confused, the disciples are spiritual giants. According to Acts 2:14, Peter stood up and addressed the crowd. He reminds them of two things. First, he reminds them of Joel's prophesy (Joel 2:28) about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Second, he reminds them of the ministry and resurrection of Jesus. He concludes his Pentecost sermon with a challenge. They are to repent and believe in Jesus. Those words did not fall on deaf ears. According to Acts 2:41, 3,000 people accepted Jesus on that day. It was one of the great moments in the history of the early church. The doors of the Kingdom of God were wide open on that day. Today, the doors into the Kingdom of God can be much narrower. Can I ask you a personal question?

How many souls have you won for Jesus Christ? Did you know, according to various sources, only 1% of all Christians have won a soul for Jesus Christ? That means 99% of us have never won a soul for Jesus Christ. Maybe that is why so many know the story of Jonah. It is not that we are fascinated with fish. It is that we can relate to Jonah. He was to go to Nineveh and call them to repent. He refused to go. We are to win the world for Jesus Christ, but we refuse to evangelize. How many souls have you won for

Jesus Christ? If you are embarrassed by your answer says, "**Amen!**" Here is a question you must answer.

Why aren't Christians evangelizing? That is the question Steven Lee tried to answer. He is a pastor in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In a website called *Desiring God*, he says there are four basic reasons why Christians don't evangelize. Maybe you will find yourself on this list.

1. **Ignorance** How many times have you heard the Gospel message in sermons, books and conversations. You have heard the Gospel message, but do you know the Gospel message. Could you share the Gospel message in sixty seconds, right now? Some don't evangelize because of ignorance.
2. **Apathy** We live in a society that is preoccupied with animals. Everyone wants to know if their pet will be waiting for them in heaven. I am not as worried about pets, as I am people. Once we get all the people into heaven, I will worry about animals. Some don't share the Gospel message, because they really don't care about people. Some don't evangelize because of ignorance. Some don't evangelize because they are apathetic.
3. **Fear** Faith has a way of mobilizing us. Fear has a way to immobilizing us. Some don't evangelize because they are afraid. Some are afraid of losing popularity. Some are afraid of losing respect within their group. Some don't evangelize because of ignorance. Some don't evangelize because they are apathetic. Some don't evangelize because of fear.
4. **Discrimination** That is Jonah's story. He didn't want to go to Nineveh because he didn't like the Ninevites. It may have been the way they looked. It may have been the way they lived. It may have been their language. We understand discrimination, because, sad but true, discrimination is a big part of our society. How many groups do you belittle? Some don't evangelize because of ignorance. Some don't evangelize because they are apathetic. Some don't evangelize because of fear. Some don't evangelize because of discrimination.

If those four points make you think say, "**Amen!**" Can I give you some relief?

I believe, the 99% statistic is wrong. I believe, many more than 1% of all Christians have won a soul for Jesus Christ. I believe, that statistic is wrong because the question, itself, is flawed. The question, have you won a soul for Jesus Christ, reminds us of Billy Graham's great evangelistic crusades. At the end of every service an altar call was given, and countless people emotionally came forward to accept Jesus. Evangelism is not limited to altar calls. Evangelism is not limited to a one-time experience. Evangelism is anytime we share Jesus. How many times have you shared Jesus with your words or actions? Let me tell you a little story.

My mother-in-law, Teresa was a strong Methodist. She was raised in the Okmulgee Methodist Church in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, home of the fighting Bulldogs. When she married and moved to Cleveland, she joined the Broadway Methodist Church. When she bought a house in the suburbs, she joined the Bedford Methodist Church. In 1968, the Bedford Methodist Church became the Bedford United Methodist Church, when the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren denominations merged. She had a special place in her heart for the church in Bedford, for she raised her family there. Passing the faith on to her children was important. I am confident there were many fine Sunday school teachers during those years.

However, the best Sunday school teacher at Bedford United Methodist, in my wife's humble opinion, was a woman by the name of Carol. She did not work outside of the home. She stayed at home to raise her three sons. She wanted the best for them and the best she had to offer them was Jesus. It was for this reason she taught the high school class, which included her sons and my wife, Kathryn. Every Sunday morning at 9:30, she was with a group of high school students talking about Jesus. Not a single student in that class questioned her sincerity, she had known Jesus for years. Not a single student in the class questioned her commitment to them. She wanted the best for them and the best for them was Jesus. A reliable source tells me, Bedford once received a boring dry preacher. Carol knew the teenagers wouldn't get any spiritual guidance from him, so she packed up her students in her station wagon and took them to worship at the nearby Baptist church. She wanted them to hear about Jesus. It was during one those beyond the extra call of duty activities my wife heard the call the ministry.

As a loving husband, I have to say, Carol changed my wife's life. When Kathryn was in high school, Carol made her feel special. When Kathryn was in college, Carol prayed for her regularly. When Kathryn was in seminary, Carol invited her to come back to the church to speak to a small group of women. It was a way to encourage her. When Kathryn took those first United Methodist appointments, Carol saw her potential. When Kathryn and I moved to the Cleveland area, Carol visited our churches. When our children were young, Carol watched them in her home. When we travel back to Bedford to remember the life of a lost saint from that church, Carol is there and is hungry to hear about our ministries today. She wants to know what Jesus is doing in our lives now. When our daughter, Anna, gets married next May, guess who is going to be invited? Ask Carol if she saved Kathryn's soul for Jesus Christ and she will say, "No!" But she evangelized to Kathryn for years.

Evangelism is a funny thing. It has been said, evangelism is like serving a meal. You may make it look appealing, but it is God who gives the appetite. I can give you a big list of things Carol is not. She is not young. She is not a super model. She is not rich. She is not a great singer or entertainer. Yet, she maybe the finest person I have ever known. You can't help but admire her. She has always brought the best out in other

people because she always wanted the best for them. She knew the best she could offer them was Jesus. Can I ask you a question?

Who led you to Jesus? Who was the Carol in your life? It is safe to say, that person did not have an advanced degree in evangelism. It is equally safe to say, that person knew Jesus and wanted the best for you. The best we can offer people is Jesus. Luis Palau must have known Carol. He once said, "*Evangelism is not an option for the Christian life.*" And, all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"