

Sermon: Chucking Jonahs

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41

Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans

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You know, there's another story in our sacred scriptures that sounds a lot like this one. It's a passage that would have been in the ears of first century Jewish listeners from their own Hebrew scriptures as they heard Mark read or retell this story of the storm. It too involved someone called by God, a boat, frightened sailors, this person sleeping and then a calming of a storm. Do you know what it is? That's right, the story of Jonah and the whale. Granted Jonah was a little more weasel-y and scared than Jesus was and Jonah's voyage was set in the opposite direction of where God asked him to go but the parallels are obvious and would have been to those recounting this moment and hearing of this moment on the Sea of Galilee as well.

Just recall with me Jonah's story. He was a Jewish prophet called by God to cross the sea in order to warn the wicked gentile Ninevites about their impending doom if they didn't shape up. We learn as the story proceeds that Jonah, like most prophets, was none too thrilled with his divine assignment. In fact he was so UNthrilled that he took off in the opposite direction, towards safer waters and safer shores. When his storm arose and tossed the boat to the point of capsizing it, Jonah was asleep in the hull. The other men on the boat were freaked out and yelling at Jonah "how can you sleep, get up, call on your God and maybe he will save us?" And Jonah with a big huff, realizing he didn't make it far far running from the almighty God said to the terrified men, "yeah, this is probably my fault." And they said amidst the howling wind and crashing sea "then, tell us, what shall

we do?” And Jonah who wasn’t all weasel said “well, you probably should toss me overboard... I mean, I don’t want go overboard but if I were you I’d chuck me overboard.” The men grabbed him and threw him overboard and sure enough the raging sea calmed. That chapter of Jonah ends “At this, the calming of the storm, the men were terrified and greatly feared the Lord!”

So this is meant to ring in our ears as we hear the story of Jesus on the boat with his disciples in the storm. And the associations in your mind would likely lead you to consider - since Jonah was the sacrificial offering by the sailors for the quieting of the raging storm, you would have, likely wondered how sacrifice of Jesus would play into the story. The disciples didn’t chuck Jesus over the boat but they seemed about ready to, accusing him of not caring about them – “what are you doing just sleeping there, you don’t care about us?!” The fear of the storm out there bled into an internal storm in here and they were as angry as they were scared. You know how those two emotions can bleed into one another, fear and anger.

But they didn’t throw Jesus overboard as a sacrificial offering, instead he simply awoke and with a huff rebuked the storm - “Quiet, be still! And the wind died down and it was completely calm.” (Mark 4:39) This prefigured what was to come. Jesus would eventually offer himself sacrifice and his offering would have cosmic implications for the unruly powers of creation and those of the spirit as well, so much so that even today we might call upon his spirit and garner strength and find calm in the midst of the storms of our lives. But in both cases of Jonah and Jesus, the calming of the storm required and it does require sacrifice, and the heart of what we usually must sacrifice is captured in that famous AA phrase “let go and let God”. There is a rigid clinging terrified quality to the sailors aboard

both boats – it's not supposed to be this way, this wasn't how I was planning to go, this is not fun! And it's Jonah's letting go and offering himself up to God's purposes that quells the storm and it is in Jesus' very nature a sacrifice of his whole life to God, so radically, that enables him to have powers over the elements of the earth.

Now what does all this have to do with our healing service today? Well, Christine Tresselt in a moment is going to lead us in our healing practice for the day. Normally at this our annual Healing Sunday service we have healing stations that we invite you to come to with a laying on of hands or a personal prayer for healing that the Health Ministry Team offers. But today our healing practice that you are invited into is something you can do right in your seats, something we do naturally everyday rarely thinking about it and that is simply BREATHING. But what people in various spiritual traditions and none at all have long since discovered is that there is an immense difference between our everyday breathing and breathing intentionally. There's a difference between breathing while your mind is racing or you're busy with other things and breathing while you are quite aware that your breathing!

And the difference has to do with offering up ourselves unto God. Breathing involves sacrifice. In order to live you must take in air into your lungs.... but that's only half the equation, because you've got to release and sacrifice that breath in order to then receive another and then you must sacrifice that one and then the next and the next. Breathing in and of itself is a practice in "letting go and letting God", trusting that if you let this breath go there will be another one to take after that. And being conscious of our breath encourages an awareness of

breathing itself as a natural healing dynamic that blesses our lives at every second!

But that's not all you are sacrificing when you breath consciously. What you are also sacrificing – and this is the hard part - all the other things that are on your mind which you must let go in order to focus on your breathing. You have to let go of the plans you've been making for after church while I've been preaching. And you have to let go of that issue at work. And you have to let go of wrestling over that relationship that is making you sad or crazy or afraid. You have to let go of your worry for your child. You have to let go of that hurt or that anger or that worry. In other words, we often have this internal storm of thoughts and feelings and in order to still the storm we have to sacrifice the little Jonahs in your mind boats, just chuck 'em overboard for a moment. Oh they'll find a way back on – don't you worry, they are masterful at that – but if you can chuck 'em overboard for a moment you'll find that what lies beneath is God's stillness and peace. Or another way of considering it is amidst that internal storm, to rouse the sleeping Jesus inside you and invite Him to still the storms of your life and show you the deeper truer peace, healing, restoration that lies beneath all the jangle. I mean, it's *possible* that what would happen when we quiet all that jangling going on inside of us is that there would be darkness and threat and chaos. But that's not what you find there when you chuck out your Jonahs and wake your sleeping Jesus... rather it's stillness, quietness, peace, calm... You find grace. You find the presence of love. It's only our stormy distractions keeping us from knowing that.

Denise Levertov has a beautiful poem about it called The Avowal and I'll end with her words. Then Christine will guide us there to that place of letting go and receiving God's healing grace.... The Avowal:

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.