

### 3 Epiphany

#### Jonah 3:1-10

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup>So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city,<sup>[a]</sup> three days' journey in breadth.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

<sup>6</sup>The word reached<sup>[c]</sup> the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup>And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, <sup>8</sup>but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. <sup>9</sup>Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

<sup>10</sup>When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

#### Psalm 62:5-12

<sup>6</sup> For God alone my soul in | silence waits;\*  
truly, my hope | is in him.

<sup>7</sup> He alone is my rock and | my salvation,\*  
my stronghold, so that I shall | not be shaken.

<sup>8</sup> In God is my safety | and my honor;\*  
God is my strong rock | and my refuge.

<sup>9</sup> Put your trust in him al- | ways, O people,\*  
pour out your hearts before him, for God | is our refuge.

<sup>10</sup> Those of high degree are but a | fleeting breath,\*  
even those of low estate can- | not be trusted.

- <sup>11</sup> On the scales they are lighter | than a breath,\*  
all of | them together.
- <sup>12</sup> Put no trust in extortion; in robbery take no | empty pride; \*  
though wealth increase, set not your | heart upon it.
- <sup>13</sup> God has spoken once, twice | have I heard it,\*  
that power be- | longs to God.
- <sup>14</sup> Steadfast love is | yours, O Lord,\*  
for you repay everyone according | to his deeds.

### 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

<sup>29</sup>This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, <sup>30</sup>and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, <sup>31</sup>and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

### Mark 1:14-20

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;<sup>[e]</sup> repent and believe in the gospel."

<sup>16</sup>Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

### Message: Repent and Believe

Frank's cell phone rings and it's Bethany on the other end: "Honey, I'm Home!"

Married for 25 years, Frank and Bethany are the poster couple for wedded bliss. Bethany's job takes her away for long periods – sometimes months.

Usually Frank knows when her flight is due to arrive and is always there to greet her at the airport with flowers and reservations at fine restaurant.

This time, however, Bethany wants to surprise him. Having kept not only the flight arrival time a secret but the arrival date as well, she's caught a cab from the airport and is pulling in the driveway even as she speaks! "Honey, I'm home!"

So, here's the question: Is that announcement good news for Frank? Having been separated from his beloved for months, suddenly she's come near – she's at the front door! She's here – she's home! Is it good news?

It really depends, doesn't it? It depends on how Frank has been conducting himself in Bethany absence! Upon hearing Bethany's voice, Frank's heart may start to pound as he anticipates seeing his loved one – holding her for the first time in months! Or it may start to pound as he looks around the house and thinks, "Uh-Oh! Busted!"

Either way, time's up! His beloved has come near – she's home!

And so Christ Jesus shows up on the doorstep of our hearts announcing, "The kingdom of God is here! Honey, I'm home!" He means for it to be heard, received as good news – the best news in the world. But, unlike a spouse who may or may not know how her loved one will take the announcement, Christ Jesus knows us! He *knows* that because of our brokenness and sin, we aren't able to hear – we can't hear it as good news; we can't hear the loving honey/beloved part of the announcement.

He knows how sinners will take the news! If we'll just be honest with ourselves, we'll recognize that we're terrified! We're caught red-handed, and time is up – the kingdom of God has come in Christ Jesus.

Because Jesus knows us, he teaches us how to hear the good news: repent – repent *so that* you can believe and hear the announcement for the good news it truly is. Jesus doesn't wait for us to repent before he gives the good news. He gives it to us up front: the kingdom of God is here!

Repentance is not so much a formula as it is a description. It's a description of what returning to God is like; it's what allows us to hear the proclamation for what it really is – good news! Repentance is what enables us to hear in Jesus' proclamation the call to the beloved – Honey! I'm home!

But even knowing that does not necessarily turn our heart pounding panic into jumping for joy. Because, again, when we're honest with ourselves, we realize that this repentance is something that we desperately need and can't accomplish! This repentance we're talking about is not some sort of requirement God makes or demands before He can forgive us. Repentance is the description of what going back to God is like. If you ask God to take you back without it, you're asking him to take you back without going back! That's impossible! Repentance is a total surrender of our wills; a willingness to turn around, go back, retrace steps that we have practiced for thousands of years. Repentance is to unlearn a way of life that is so engrained in us that it is carved into our DNA – lives of arrogance, entitlement, lives of seeking to be god rather than have one.

Neither is repentance a formula or a negotiating technique; it is not an if/then proposition: if we do this, then God will do that. The king of Nineveh does not decree sackcloth and ashes to save his skin! Selfish self-preservation is hardly a commendable motive for repentance! Instead, the king's proclamation reveals his awareness that repentance is appropriate not for what he'll get out of it, but because of whom he has offended! *Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.*

Who knows? Maybe God will relent, maybe he won't. But repentance is right and proper for its own sake, not for what we stand to gain by it!

But Christ Jesus loves us so much that he's even willing to do that for us as well! A few weeks ago we celebrated the baptism of Jesus. Do you remember what Mark told us about that? Mark 1:4-11 *And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for*

*the forgiveness of sins...<sup>9</sup>At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan...*

Think about that: John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins...and Jesus shows up for it! Why did Jesus do that? He certainly didn't need it! He did it for us! Jesus doesn't wait for us to repent before he proclaims the good news. He tells us good news up front and then even repents for us because we don't have the ability to do even that on our own!

The paradox is that the very thing that will allow us to fully experience the Good news as good news – that the kingdom of God has come – is the very thing we can't do. Our confessions declare that we cannot by our own power or understanding believe in Christ Jesus or come to him. Without Jesus, we cannot even repent! So the good news gets even better: Christ Jesus arrives proclaiming to his beloved, the Church, *Honey, I'm home!* Now there's nothing standing in our way when calls again, Come and follow me!

Thanks be to God!

## **THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH**

With gratitude for the gift of Christ, let us draw near to our heavenly Father in prayer, asking his mercy for the Church, the world, and all who need his loving-kindness.

*A brief silence*

Heavenly Father, yet again you show your patience, even when we are slow to understand, obey, and proclaim your Word. We are often so much like Jonah! Forgive us when we are half-hearted, or worse, grumpy when someone we dislike actually repents.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You called Jonah to preach repentance to Nineveh; and your Son called his disciples to proclaim repentance and the coming of your Kingdom. Give your Church boldness to preach of judgment, repentance, and forgiveness. And give it graciousness, so that many should gladly turn to Christ Jesus and be saved.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Many don't want to hear your call to repent and believe the Good News. Some don't tolerate those who do believe. Because of that, Christians suffer throughout the world. Have mercy on your servants; and do not let their witness falter.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Have mercy when, like Jonah, we want to run from the tasks you have called us to do! Renew our faith. Give us words that lovingly call others to repentance and trust in you. Shape our actions to model Jesus' compassion. Help us to rejoice when someone surprises us with repentance or new-found faith.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray this day for our members in their middle years. Grant them the fire and enthusiasm of youth, and the wisdom and humility that comes with years. Form them into fishers of men and women, eager to make disciples for your Kingdom

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless the leaders of all nations, especially our own. Give them integrity, wisdom, humility, and sound judgment. We pray for our new President and vice-president, and for all who have taken an oath of office to serve the people of this nation in accordance with the Constitution. Give us grace to live in concord and unity with one another. And give us peace.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We lift before you the needs of the lonely and bereaved; the forgotten and abandoned; the abused—and their abusers. Whatsoever they need, grant in double measure. Especially we plead on behalf of loved ones who seek our prayers, including: the VansCoy family, Mary Rathe, Mary Ann Stegen, Johnny Feulner, Dolores Rodela, Richard Schlee, and Pr. Mel Harris. Grant them faith to firmly cling to your promise of health and salvation.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, we remember with reverence and affection our departed loved ones. Comfort and support all who grieve, especially the family of Florence Hatcher, the family of Duane Denton (Michelle Borrett's brother-in-law), the family of Delores Miede-Schmitt, (Mark Miede's mother). Keep us united with them in bonds of faith and love. Turn our hearts in repentance and trust toward you. In your good time, deliver us into the fullness of that blessed Kingdom announced and promised to us by your beloved Son. With all the redeemed, let us praise and adore you forever.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**