

22JAN12 Text: Jonah 3:1-2 ***“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Ninevah, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.’”***

One of my favorite Christmas ornaments, which hung on our Christmas tree again this past Christmas, was a hand-blown pale blue glass whale. Hanging down in the center of this whale is a little red and green hand-blown glass figure, the figure of Jonah. (Of course, we purchased the ornament at Bronners!) I think I like the ornament so much because Jonah is someone I can relate to. Jonah was not a *hero* by any stretch of the imagination. God is the hero of this short book of the Bible; Jonah is His rebellious and reluctant prophet. I like Jonah because I see in his response to God’s command and God’s compassion for the lost an example of how NOT to respond to God. I like Jonah because his life is a reminder to me that God uses and chooses people to accomplish His saving purpose *IN SPITE OF* their **reluctance** and their **rebellion**. We learn from the book of Jonah, as elsewhere in Holy Scripture that it is

GOD’S EARNEST DESIRE

that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth and obtain eternal life. On this Sanctity of Human Life Sunday we will also recall that God’s earnest desire not only pertains to His gift of salvation and eternal life but also to His gift of physical **life**. God’s earnest desire is for life—to **care** and not *kill*, to **heal** and not to *harm*, to **help** and not to *hate*—and He has given life to His human creatures so that it is properly cherished as the precious gift that it is.

Yes, God earnestly desires to save all people from eternal death and condemnation and give them the gift of eternal life. That word “all” really means all. **God’s mercy and compassion go to out to each and every lost sinner with the invitation to turn from sin and embrace Jesus Christ as Savior by faith.** In the book of Jonah we see this earnest desire of God spelled out in **big, bold letters**. God sends Jonah to the great and powerful Gentile city of Ninevah, a city of over 120,000 people, one of the greatest, if not THE greatest city of the Assyrian empire. One thing, though, about those Assyrians—**they were enemies of the God’s people**. Of *all* the miserable places for God to choose to send His prophet to speak on His behalf! It would be like the President asking you to go to Kabal, Afghanistan or Tehran, Iran and there walk through the streets waving an American flag! Wouldn’t you hesitate and be reluctant to do so? Jonah was asked by the LORD to travel 500 miles **WEST** to preach a stern Law

message of repentance to the great city of Ninevah. Jonah booked passage on the first ship he could find sailing **EAST** from Joppa to Tarshish, far away from Ninevah, across the Mediterranean Sea, in direct disobedience to God's clear command. But there was more to it than that. **Jonah didn't have the same desire that God had to save the Assyrians.** After all, they were, well...*enemies*. They didn't deserve salvation.

Funny thing about salvation...**God's earnest desire is to save ALL people.** We need look no farther than the face of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and see there the great love and mercy of God. To rebellious and thankless creatures who despised God and His Word, God still reached out with love and mercy. Jesus came to this world to **bear** a load we could never bear: the *load* of sin. Jesus came to this world to **release** us from a prison from which we could never escape on our own: the *prison* of death. By His death on the cross, Jesus has paid the complete penalty for all our sins and by His glorious resurrection, He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Perhaps another reason I like that "Jonah in the belly of the whale" ornament so much is that of all the prophets in the Old Testament, it is the prophet Jonah to whom Jesus points as a symbol of His own resurrection on the third day. Jesus said, *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth."* (Matt. 12:39,40) Jesus' death and resurrection are our **guarantee** that God **earnestly desires** to save **all** people from sin and death, and He has that same earnest desire for **you** and **me** as well!

What's the problem then? What was Jonah's problem if it wasn't only his **disobedience** to God's command and his **reluctance** to preach God's message in Ninevah? Jonah's problem is a problem that God's people have to this very day, We, like he, often don't have the same earnest desire that God had, namely, that earnest desire to save all people. We, like Jonah, often **prejudge** people and/or we often **begrudge** God's mercy and compassion to some whom we deem not *deserving* of the Gospel, especially our enemies. *"Dear God, those awful practitioners of abortion and those miserable "right to die" folks...You surely don't mean that Your **desire** is to save **them**, do you?" "Dear God, those miserable terrorists and Islamic jihadists...You surely don't mean that Your **desire** is to save **them**, do you?" "Dear God, my hateful ex, my insensitive boss, my_____ " **you fill in the blank...** *"You surely don't mean that Your **desire** is to save **them**, do you?"* **Jonah didn't want to preach to Ninevah because he didn't want that great city to repent, he didn't want the grace of God to touch the lives of unbelieving Gentiles and a nation of his avowed enemies.** Jonah*

failed to recognize that God's love and concern are for **all** people. Jonah failed to understand his own role in carrying the Word of God to those whom he felt were unworthy of God's love, those who were unbelievers. Jonah's problem is our problem too...so often and in so many ways we flee from the tasks God places before us of bringing His Word of life to our dying world and of bringing a message of life to a world *hell-bent* on death and destroying human life, life that is precious from the moment of conception to one's dying breath.

We, like Jonah, have a powerful message to share with our world today. It's a message of **eternal life** in Jesus' name. It's a message of the gift of physical life. We, like Jonah, have God's powerful Word to proclaim to a world that needs to be called to repentance. Reluctant though we may be to talk about abortion and other life and death issues, **we need to remember that God has something to say about such issues.** The message we have to share is **God's** message, not ours. We want people to listen to God and to believe in Him because God's earnest desire is for eternal life for them and here in time, all the blessings and the blessings of physical life. God loves human life so much that He wants to protect it from harm. So He says in the 5th Commandment, "*You shall not murder*" (Ex. 20:13). It is not our right to choose that an innocent human being should die in order to solve a personal problem. It is not our choice to end someone's life in an effort to relieve suffering. God loves human life so much that He wants to protect it from the harm of bad choices. So God says to us, "*Flee from sexual immorality*" (1 Cor. 6:18). Living chaste and decent lives enables people to avoid a whole host of destructive consequences. God is the One who has given value to each and every human life through His redeeming hands. "***You were bought at a price,***" Paul reminds us (1 Cor. 6:20). It wasn't gold or silver by which we were purchased from sin and death, but with the holy and precious blood of Jesus. That gives life **value!**

GOD'S EARNEST DESIRE is to **give eternal life to all in Christ Jesus** and GOD'S EARNEST DESIRE is that **all people cherish His gift of life.** What a positive message of the God-given value of human life we have! The embryo in the Petri dish, the baby in the womb, the child on the play ground and the child with Down Syndrome playing with him, the professional athlete and the paraplegic in the wheelchair, the energetic young business woman, the young man with MS, the healthy grandpa on the golf course, the frail grandma in the nursing home—all are people created by God. All of these are people for whom Jesus died. Therefore, they **all** have **value** and **dignity** and **purpose.**

God gave Jonah a second chance after Jonah had disobeyed God and ran from his God-given duty. After the great fish spit him out on the dry land, **the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time** and God sent Jonah back to Ninevah. This time Jonah went as God had commanded. Jonah preached Law and repentance and, wonder of wonders, the great city of Ninevah listened to the Word of the Lord. **From the greatest to the least, the people repented and their city was spared!** GOD'S EARNEST DESIRE is never for the death of the sinner but always to call sinners to repentance as He seeks to share His love and forgiveness and eternal life with them. God's message of life and forgiveness is also ours to share. There are many Christians out there and undoubtedly some right here in these very pews who have made mistakes when it comes to decisions about life and death. They have not led chaste and decent lives, they may have chosen abortion, they have made wrong decisions about the use of certain technologies...they have made mistakes in life and they know it. They are filled with guilt and regret and are sitting in their own version of sackcloth and ashes. Let us not have the attitude of Jonah that such "bad guys" should get what they deserve because of their wrong decisions. **We are all "bad guys."** We all have sinned. It is not the **magnitude** of our sin that puts us under God's judgment. **Sin** puts us there. Like the Ninevites, we **deserve** God's wrath. **Like the Ninevites, we do not get what we deserve.** God satisfied His wrath once and for all by giving Jesus what we deserved as He hung on the cross in our place. Jesus got what **we** deserve and **we** get what we do **not** deserve: the holiness of Jesus covering all of our sins. Through faith in Jesus, God views us as 100% holy and blameless. We declare with Jonah, *"You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love"* (4:2).

Are you on your way to Ninevah today or are you sailing in the opposite direction to Tarshish? Are you earnestly **desiring** that **all** people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth or is your desire that God's love in Christ **only** touch **your** life? Do you see **your** part in God's plan for **carrying His message of life into our modern culture of death?** Let us pray that **GOD'S EARNEST DESIRE** become **our** earnest desire...that **all** be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, that **all** cherish His precious gift of life, for Jesus' sake. Amen.