

**Sermon Series/Message: Awakenings Part 1**

**Scriptural Lesson: Jonah 3: 1-5,10**

**Date: January 24, 2020**

**Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel**

**We are continuing with our Awakening series; a series designed with the preaching hope and intention to discover moments where you and I might receive more clarity or discernment or perhaps even perspective; as we continue to strive to do the great work of doing justice, love mercy and walking humbly with God.**

- This week we will begin part 1 of this journey and my hope is to speak first to the heart of the individual;
- So what this means is that as a preacher, I am hoping to bring this Word right to the very place that you are sitting, or perhaps even laying;

- Hoping that through this sermon series that a light bulb of clarity, direction and spiritual awakening might illumine your heart and soul;
- At the same time, I am reminding you that as your Spiritual Leader, I am not omitted from this process of discernment as well;
- You and I, wherever you may be; I stopped by to say that we are in this discernment process together!
- And so looking at the story of Jonah and zooming in on the first sentence of our scriptural passage today that says that; *The word of the Lord came to Jonah a **second time***
- My curiosity is beginning to peak at this admission of it being “**the second time**”, that Jonah was given this message to the people of Nineveh;
- Causing me to raise the following questions that might awaken us all today and that is; “how long

does it take for a bad situation to turn around for the good?”

- And what I mean by good, stems from John Wesley, the founder of Methodism who was quoted as saying; Do all the good you can,

By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.

- So looking at this explanation of good that is self explanatory in it's written context; questions that I think about are: how long does it take, for people to choose to operate from the place of good?
- What does it take for people to be motivated to do good?
- Why is it so difficult at times to do what is good?
- How do you know when you are doing good?

- What are the things that tend to keep us from doing what is good?
- What does it mean to do good?
  
- This church is my preaching focus for the current hour....
- Because over the past few weeks and perhaps even years;
- I don't know about you, but it seems to me that the world's metaphorical cheese has seemed to slip off its' cracker.
- For principles and values of doing justice has seemed to be replaced with various forms of injustice;
- Values centered around modeling ourselves with a spirit of mercy has seemed to slip away only to be replaced with greed, apathy and indifference.

- And before shame begins to creep up some of our spirits;
- Allow me to extend this invitation to you for consideration;
- That none of us and I mean none of us are excluded from this predicament of what I am naming;
- That doing good; doing the right thing becomes difficult somewhere at the end of some of our kindergarten years I would suspect;
- Because after all, as we get older, wars and racial division and more cannot merely just be solved by simply sharing half of one's ho ho with your classmate;
- Oh but there is a part of me who wishes it was that simple to simply share my Twinkie to end women's oppression...

- Oh how I wish that I could trade my tuna sandwich in return for peace and justice for all....
- Oh if it were that simple.....
- But the sobering reality is that it is not this simple...
- This is why I am raising this important although uncomfortable conversation;
- Because no matter how difficult it may be to examine our own deficits of good within our hearts;
- I believe that it is necessary, if we hope to do the work that lies ahead for reforming systems that perpetuate oppression, injustices and the overall degradation of human lives and the capitalization of human suffering;
- Furthermore, I stopped by to suggest as I turn briefly into our scripture today, that the people of Nineveh weren't the only ones who were having a hard time discerning what it meant to do what is good or do what was right;

- For the struggle of doing good I will reiterate again is a humanity problem as a whole;
- **Regardless of** what side of the railroad tracks you or I might find ourselves living on;
- **Regardless of** what income bracket we may find ourselves in;
- **Regardless of** our level of education, our ethnic and racial makeup;
- **Regardless of** our genealogy our history, our ancestry;
- I stopped by to suggest that we all have issues with doing what is good;
- **Otherwise why** would the great Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have to make a quote, “The time is always right to do what is right...”
- **Otherwise why** would Paul have to name his struggle proclaiming *I don't really understand*

*myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. (Romans 7:15)*

- **Otherwise why** would theologian St. Augustine have to write an entire autobiography entitled *The Confessions of Saint Augustine.*”
- **Otherwise why** would self-help books still be in high demand in the bookstores;
- **Why is** the pharmaceutical companies as it pertains to mood and emotional health and well being still so successful?
- **Why is** the homeopathic industry so successful?
- **Why is** the narcotic business so successful?
- Friends, this is not a message of condemnation;
- This is not a message designed to promote guilt;
- This is a message to awaken us all;
- To suggest that **whether you or I** call it sin,
- **Whether you or I** call it evil
- **Whether you or I** call it just life,



- I am not too concerned with what you or I call it; **as long as we do call it;**
- **As long as you and I** can get to a point in our lives where we can name it;
- That the process towards Christian and Holy perfection is important;
- **If we hope** to even grasp an inkling of the love that God has for you and I;
- **If you and I hope** to even begin to model a mustard seed of the Perfect love that God has for humanity as a whole;
- **We must call it;**
- **We must name it;**
- As plain as David in the 51st Psalm verse 10;
- *Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a right spirit within me.*

- **For as I turn the corner slightly in this message, as I would imagine a lot of you may be ready for me to do so right about now;**
- That is if you have not already shut your computer down altogether;
- That is ok too...
- For one thing about the world of social media;
- What we put out there in cyberspace is as eternal as the after life when we are blessed to see Jesus again;
- Friend, that is a word all by itself.....
- **But jumping into our scriptural lesson today; this is why I stopped by to suggest that the people of Nineveh in our passage today is such rockstars in my eyes;**
- Because if they were alive today and had access to social media...

- I would suggest that they chose not to end the live feed of my Holy Spirit inspired message today;
- For to make this passage as plain as can be,
- The social media of their day was one person....the prophet Jonah;
- Who was may I add, not a willing messenger for these people;
- For we all know Jonah right;
- Jonah was the prophet who a lot of us may have learned way back in Sunday school; was swallowed up by a whale...
- Why?
- Well Jonah simply didn't want to go to Nineveh because he thought the people of Nineveh was useless;
- He thought that they were a people who were not able to be reformed...

- This is why the scripture emphasized that Jonah came to these people “the second time...”
- Letting all of the pursuers of justice of today know, that anytime you or I choose to take on the work of making spaces that perpetuate doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God;
- That our work will most likely require a second time and a third time and fourth time and so on;
- For this goes back to the opening questions that I raised earlier of what it means to do good;
- Because the reality for the people of Nineveh, there was something that kept them as a people from doing what was good;
- There was something that kept these people from Nineveh from doing what was right.
- For although historically the actual place of Nineveh; biblically it would suggest that Three

times (Jonah 1:2; 3:2; and 4:11) Nineveh is called “that great city.”

- For The circuit of the inner wall was about eight miles; hence it is believed that the **exceeding great city** referred not just to that part of the city which was within the walls, but to the entire metropolitan area.
- The Ninevites themselves were known to be cruel;
- The Ninevites were known to turn to violence.
- But even in this reality I celebrate the Ninevites;
- For sometimes it is human temptation that when we are told about our wrong doings we become defensive;
- We shut down;
- We may even lash out towards the messenger;
- For the old adage; sometimes the truth hurts;
- Resonates with me, I don't know about you;

- For there have been many painful lessons I have personally experienced when I was unable to hear the truth;
- There have been many people that I have personally hurt and had to make amends with when hearing hard truths caused my heart to harden;
- There have been many times where I have shut myself away from everyone; the world, my children, my spouse because I did not want to face the truth of my growing edges;
- But I stopped by to suggest that when you do this; it is the antithesis of God's grace;
- When our hearts harden towards tough lessons of humility, reform and rehabilitation, it hinders our spiritual growth;
- It hinders us from becoming our best selves in God;

- It hinders us from being able to experience the world in all of its fullness; in all of its infinite possibilities;
- When we refuse to enter in the process of leaders such as David;
- When we refuse to humble ourselves like the Ninevites in our passage who the Word tells us that at the news of receiving some hard truths;
- News that their corrupt actions would come with a heavy price of irreparable consequences; the reality is that we only hinder ourselves more.
- So you see Church, this is why I celebrate the Ninevites in our story;
- For their response to what I know, had to have been hard news to receive; especially from a prophet who literally despised them I might add;
- Their response was to enter into a spiritual fast;

- Everyone of the the Word tells us, proclaimed a fast; great and small;
- They put on sackcloth; a sign of their humility and repentance;
- They took some time of deep reflection,
- They took some time of intentional sacrifice;
- To step away from the corrupt and chaotic world that surrounded them;
- They took the time to examine the good, the bad and the ugly of their action;
- They took the time to allow the silence to envelop them; to challenge them; to mold them, to restore them;
- They took the time to take a breath and consider who they were and whose they were;
- Proving Jonah's reluctance and dismissal of them to be a whole other lesson of learning for all of the pursuers of justice, love and peace for all in itself;



- That we must never get tired of seeking justice;
- We must never get tired of seeking mercy;
- Me must never get tired of doing what is right on all sides;
- For at the right time;
- Just when our efforts may seem as if they were in vain;
- Just when it may seem that evil has conquered good;
- Harvest time has finally come;
- Highlighting for all of us in need of repentance to embody and celebrate Galatians 6:9;

*To not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

Let the Church say Amen

\*\*\*\*\*  
**Sermon Series/Message: Awakenings Part 2**  
**First Lesson: Psalm 62: 5-12**  
**Gospel Lesson: Mark 1: 14-20**  
**Date: January 24, 2020**  
**Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel**

**We are continuing with our Awakening series; a series designed with the preaching hope and intention to discover moments where you and I might receive more clarity or discernment or perhaps even perspective; as we continue to strive to do the great work of doing justice, love mercy and walking humbly with God.**

- This week we will begin part 2 of this journey and my hope is to speak first to the heart of the church;
- So in part 1 of our message from the earlier service, the awakening moment was being able to name what was the first set towards the great work

that we all would need to consider in doing justice,  
doing mercy and walking humbly with God;

- And the step that emerged began with an examination within ourselves in naming that it starts with us; being able to identify the areas where we may need to be reformed ourselves;
- The main question that I raised was what does it mean to do good individually;
- And although key specifics did not emerge explicitly;
- What did emerge I believe from that sermon was the need for us as individuals to examine the things that keep us from doing good;
  - quoted as saying; Do all the good you can,

By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.

•

- The invitation was to examine the process of how we might lend ourselves to being open to personal reform;
- For I stopped by to suggest that the church is made up of a varied amount of individuals;
- And in this reality; where there is people, there will inevitably be issues;
- Where there is people, there will inevitably be conflict;
- Where there is people; there will inevitably be different worldview and upbringings that will affect every aspect of the church;
- These worldview and varied backgrounds will influence every aspect of the church;
- And yes with the right spiritual direction, teaching and intentionality, the church as a whole will do great things together;

- For just as there is wrong doing in people, there is also good.....in fact a lot of good.....
- But if I am honest, from my perspective, I do not know if the church owns the bad as well as we own the good.
- Yes we like to celebrate the missions that we do in the church; the work with Matt Talbot; the work we do with the Lydia Patterson Institute;
- We like to celebrate our programming that we offer; our music, our small groups, our teachings, our loving relationships and more;
- And don't get me wrong, I did not come to be the Debbie Downer today;
- My intent is not to rain on anyone's parade;
- For I love the church;
- The church for me is vital;
- The church is essential;
- The church in many cases for me is a sanctuary;

- When my dad passed many moons ago to pancreatic cancer, the first place I ran to was the church.
- When I got married to Stephen...I insisted that we got married in no other place but the church..
- My teenage girls were Confirmed in the Church...
- My teenage girls were baptize in the Church...
- I was Commissioned and then Ordained in the Church;
- The Church is my life;
- Some of the most important people and closest relationships that I have is nowhere else but in the Church...
- So I make all of these declarations to the entire world to proclaim that the Church is something to always be celebrated always....
- However, I would be irresponsible as your Spiritual Leader is I shied away from another Truth;

- That in the same breath as I proclaim the good, there is a lot of reform that needs to be done in the Church.
- Reform that needs to occur from the pulpit, to the worship;
- Reform in how we tell the story of the Good News that sometimes still seems to overlook or silence the oppressed, the marginalized and those who have been deemed modern day lepers of the community;
- For there is still a story that I preached a few sermons ago regarding the ten lepers a few messages ago that was found in Luke 17: 11-19;
- That out of those ten lepers that was healed by the hands of Jesus, only one turned back to say thank you.

- For there was a time where I would have pointed the blame solely on the 9 lepers that went on their way;
- But honestly it was during that time that I too was guilty of only wanting to talk about the good of the church and dismiss the bad of the church..
- There was a time where I wanted to blame sin for why those 9 lepers did not turn back to say thank you;
- There was a time that I could not see the entire picture;
- That part of the healing process of these lepers was to essentially go to the church to be made clean again;
- And after fulfilling roughly 25 years of ministry to date, I can no longer ignore the churches part in why those persons were named lepers to begin with;



- For I still shudder to think what the church as whole will look like when we return from this pandemic;
- Will matters surrounding accepting our queer family be finally resolved?
- Will matters of women being fully affirmed in leadership roles finally be resolved?
- Will matters of our role in caring for refugees in our communities and world finally be resolved?
- Will matters of diversity and inclusion for all finally be resolved?
- Will Sundays finally not be the most segregated hour of the day?
- Will any of these issues finally be resolved?
- **I will just let these questions hang out there as I bring our gospel into conversation.**
- For the opening sentence of our gospel message starts off by informing us that *John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news<sup>[a]</sup> of God,<sup>[b]</sup> 15 and*

*saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;[c] repent, and believe in the good news.”[d]*

- And immediately my preaching focus is drawn to this language of “kingdom of God.”
- Language that I bet if I were to ask in a bible study or small group, what does it mean when we say kingdom of God?—I would bet that all of us including myself would shrink away from answering;
- Mainly because the kingdom of God language is pretty vague;
- For me it is just as difficult as my raising the question in the earlier sermon, What does it mean to do good?
- Most importantly how do we know when we have done good?
- I believe the same version of these questions to ask to the larger church would be; what do we mean by the kingdom of God?
- Most importantly, how do you and I know when the church as a whole reflects the kingdom of God?

- You see church, I am not promising that this message will reveal the answer to these tough questions.
- For I stopped by to suggest that a spiritual awakening like this takes time to develop both individually and collectively.
- I will further suggest as I look further into our gospel as Jesus is inviting Simon and his brother Andrew and more to *“Follow me and I will make you fish for people”*;
- That this too may be why it is so difficult for many including myself of today to invite people into our present church communities;
- Because until the church and the individuals that makeup the church can begin to discern what the kingdom of God is and whether we reflect it or not;
- It makes it that much difficult to invite someone to follow us;
- For I can easily invite someone for instance to follow me to see a movie, for I can easily describe why I am drawn to seeing the movie;

- For there was probably a trailer or something that let me know that this said movie was something that appealed to me;
- There was something in that movie that I know might even entertain me or uplift me or challenge me and more;
- But sometimes the church can be ambiguous and unsafe from my perspective;
- Sometimes it is difficult to know what the church's spiritual DNA is and the overall beliefs are;
- And if I am honest, sometimes it is difficult for me to vouch for the church,
- Because frankly, I am not certain that if I invite someone who may look like me for instance into this space;
- I am not always certain what I may be inviting that person into;
- For our first lesson of Psalm 62 verse 8 says Trust in God at all times, O people;  
pour out your heart before him;  
God is a refuge for us;

- And if I am honest, I trust that God is a refuge,
- But when I look at the systems of oppression, marginalization and hypocrisy within the church,
- I am not certain if I can trust that the people as a whole would be a refuge for someone trying to find their belonging in the world;
- This Church is why I believe that the major awakening that we must do if we really hope to achieve the great work of doing justice, doing mercy and walking humbly with God; is to acknowledge that number one, the kingdom of God is undergirded by these very principles and values that I have named;
- The other part of the difficult work that we must look at as a Church which will be difficult for us;
- Is naming that this work must start in the church first...
- For whether we want to acknowledge it or not, I stopped by to suggest that everything that is happening on a global level as it pertains to corruption, oppression, racism and other isms;
- Unfortunately it also occurs in the church as a whole;

- The most sobering awakening is for us within this local church of First UMC Lincoln in hope that you do not stone the preacher for saying this, is that these isms that I have named occurs within this church community as well.
- As a black woman leading this congregation, I will say that although generally speaking I have had a very positive experience and feel safe in this space to be who God called to be...
- There have been some painful times;
- For the microaggressions that have come toward me as a woman and as a person of color has been debilitating for me at times;
- In fact so debilitating, that there have been some days that I do not even want to face the church let alone teach and preach in the church.
- And I am not saying this for anyone to feel sorry for me;
- I am saying this to highlight that there is still work to be done as we seek to create a space of inclusion for all people.

- I am saying this because a tough dialogue has to begin somewhere.
- And as I am wrapping up my preaching course for this semester;
- A course consisting of 10 other preachers grappling with the same fear of discussing the areas of the reform of the church in the pulpits and classrooms out of fear of losing their jobs;
- My prayer as I look back at the earlier lessons of the Ninevites who also received some hard truths from Jonah;
- My prayer is that in this sermon today, that the response is the same from the Ninevites who desired to overcome their corrupt ways through fasting and prayer;
- My prayer is that all of us can come to the table with an open heart and listening ears so that the reform can begin here....
- For that is the only way you and I will truly overcome the impact of racism and oppression; **the reform must begin here...**

- That is the only way you and I can begin to dismantle the corruption and evil in the world; **the reform must begin here;**
- That is the only way that you and I can begin to make spaces for our youth, young adults, queer communities, our sons our daughters...**the reform must begin here.**
- For if not here Church;
- **If you and I cannot** begin the tough work here...
- **If you and I cannot** set aside our egos and shegos and pride here,
- **If you and I cannot** open up our hearts and learn from one another and hear the truth of our collective stories; the good, the bad and the ugly here....
- **If you and I cannot** begin this process of the tough work of reform that requires the confession and repentance that comes from our justification in our salvation here.....



- Church if you and I cannot make a way in this wilderness and overcome the issues that our world is being divided by here.....
- So the prayer today is for the tough work to be able to begin here...
- Because if not here....then where?