

God's Liberty Is for Everyone
Message by DD Adams
Kemptown Providence UM Church
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The Old Testament lesson for today is from Jonah, chapter 4, verses 1 through 5. I'll be reading from *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, "God! I knew it - when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!

"So, God, if you won't kill them, kill *me!* I'm better off dead!" God said, "What do you have to be angry about?" But Jonah just left. He went out of the city to the east and sat down in a sulk. He put together a makeshift shelter of leafy branches and sat there in the shade to see what would happen to the city." This is God's word for God's people.

Please pray with me. God who is the Creator of all nations, races, and tribes, you created us all in love. And in your love you desire us to be free. Move in this place today and help us to open our hearts and minds to understand those who are different from us. Help us to see ourselves more clearly as God gives us a more accurate view of who we are. **SILENCE.** Let the reading, hearing, and understanding of your word ring bells of liberation in all our hearts. Extinguish all

thoughts that defy and oppose your freedom to others who are different and grant mercy and love to them through your hand and ours. Amen.

Peace be with you. The verses from Jonah are puzzling Jonah is easily open to receiving God's mercy and forgiveness, but Jonah wants God to kill the Ninevites! Yet Jonah, having a knowledge of God says, "I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness! "So, God, if you won't kill them, kill me! I'm better off dead!"

Jonah dreads the fact of seeing the wicked Assyrians from Ninevah repent and receive God's mercy—he'd rather die! Jonah's been called to go to Ninevah and preach repentance to his worst enemy!! But he's so fiercely afraid of them he ran the opposite direction right into the mouth of a whale!

Jonah rejected the thought that even the Ninevites could receive the mercy and forgiveness of God. Their tortuous crimes against humanity were well known. They'd impale, behead, and cut their enemies skin into strips and pull it off a living victim. Jonah knew well what the Assyrians had done to his people.

The Hebrew people had 400 years of captivity and bondage under the Assyrians. That was enough to send him running! But Jonah understood something about being called—because he was a believer in God. He knew obedience to God

involved suffering and that wasn't on his agenda . . . or so he thought. But Jonah agrees, knowing there's no other choice except to be chewed up by a whale.

When we look to God, open our hearts and minds and drop our pride and ego, we can see ourselves thinking the same as Jonah. *We* can have bias and prejudice of other religions and other races with different cultures than ourselves. We label that fear of difference and say it's the correct political view don't we? But fact is, we don't want to suffer any more than Jonah did. We're afraid too!

Jonah wasn't responding as God wanted him to. The Assyrian race had hurt his people terribly in so many way, and they could be a danger to his wellbeing. He was angry with this race of people. They'd cruel and oppressive to the Hebrews. Jonah wanted them wiped off the face of the earth.

Fact is Jonah was absolutely empty of God's compassion for the Assyrians, and his prayer in verses 2 and 3 is selfish. Listen again to what Jonah cries out to God. "I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!" "So, God, if you won't kill them, KILL ME! I'm better off dead!"

Jonah thinks *he's* not in need of mercy and forgiveness. He doesn't have an accurate view of himself. He doesn't see himself for who he really is—just like us. When God called Jonah to go to Ninevah, and he refused, God didn't reject him!

Instead, God shows Jonah compassion and keeps him alive in the belly of the whale as he reconsiders his situation. When Jonah cries out to God for deliverance, the whale spits him out. When we're disciplined by God we tend to be more inclined to do what God requires of us. We lose some of our ego and self-absorption to what we want, and we align ourselves more so with God's love.

All of us are in the process of becoming who God wants us to become. The Black church would cry out, "I ain't what I oughta be, but thank God, I ain't what I used to be." So, having said that, let's not run in the opposite direction from God's for our lives. Let's consider Jesus and learn to see God's way before God decides to *show us* what we need. Obedience to God is living out how God loves.

I have found the words of Henri Nouwen, my hero, to be more than poignant for my life. He says, "Can we only speak when we are fully living what we are saying? If all our words had to cover all our actions, we would be doomed to permanent silence! Sometimes we are called to proclaim God's love even when we are not yet fully able to live it."

"Does that mean we are hypocrites? ***Only when our own words no longer call us to conversion.*** Nobody completely lives up to his or her own ideals and visions. But by proclaiming our ideals and visions with great conviction and great humility, we may gradually *grow into* the truth we speak. As long as we know that

our lives always will speak louder than our words, we can trust that our words will remain humble.” O God, let it be so. Let it be so in me dear Lord. Let it be so in us!

Let’s allow God to lead us, and when we miss the mark God has in mind, repent and do an about face. Who here today has not been the beneficiary of God’s mercy and grace? We all have, so let’s be ready and willing to show that same mercy toward others. Please pray with me.

God of all mercy, love, and compassion, fill us with what we need to be truly transformed. To love and forgive others as you do. Show us when we can be and do so much more for others as we reach for that high bar of agape love. And when we’re rejected by others let our hearts be strong to move forward in the strength of your compassion to love and show mercy.

Move in us to respond with compassion as You would for all people—even when they’ve hurt us. Take the judgment and distance away from our thinking when others have hurt us and done us harm. Let us be ever so ready to respond as you would, and when mercy and love isn’t our first response, show us, dear Lord how to respond.

Change **our** hearts God because this change will change others who aren’t accustomed to being shown mercy and love. And bless us Lord with an inexhaustible surplus of your generosity so we can give to others what we have received from you. Amen.

