



Peninsula City Church

Community

Zero Gravity - Thinking

Michael Podhaczky

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Community: Zero Gravity - Thinking

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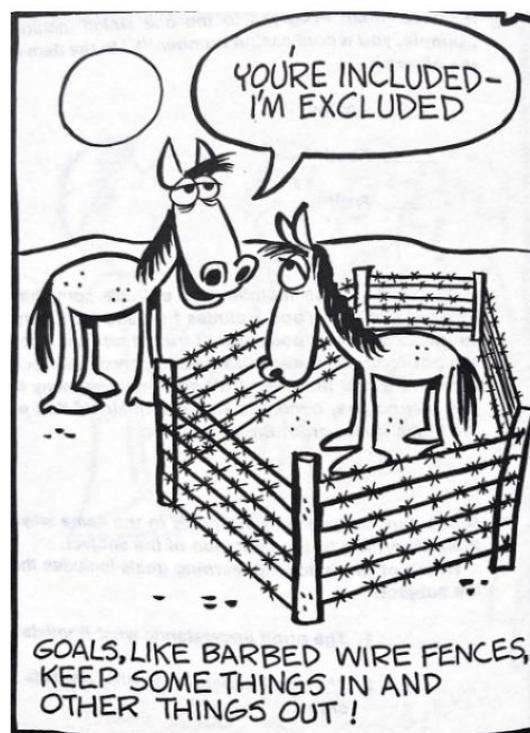
Why are You Sticking Your Nose in My Ups and Downs?

Introduction

Q. What could happen if we really grasped the idea that community is bigger than just me/us?

In any given community, there are what we could call the 'in-group' and the 'out-group'. That is, we all know about cliques within a community. You know what I mean, there are those who are included and those who are excluded for whatever reason we believe necessary. Just think about your local church who is welcome and who is not? Yes, I know you would say that everyone is welcome, but in reality, is that really the case? Who are there in the world today that, well you would not give the time of day, let alone welcome them into your holy huddle?

Have you ever stopped and thought about how you can all be selective concerning who is welcome and who is not? What about the group's rules and regulations? You know, you cannot do this or that in our community. We only accept this or that dress code, language, gender, race, nationally, behaviour, worship, Bible translation etc. You may be thinking about now, "No way! Not me I am accepting of anyone, all would be welcome. I obey God's command to love my neighbour as I love my self, Matt 22:39. Well, love is more than a cliché or holy platitude; it is to be "lived as an action."



The image is from the following source.¹

Is it possible that we may have grown to the place of being stuck in a certain way of doing community? It could be that we have built a fence around our community. We now feel safe and protected from the ones outside who we think are unsavoury or do not fit our guidelines of acceptance. We may have an over-attachment to our community, to the point that we have become boxed in, in our opinions and thoughts and actions.

The focus of this paper is to take another look at what it means being part of a community. It may be time to do some soul searching and lateral thinking to be able to see (or refocus the way we see) others the way as God sees them. We need to say like David,

²³ "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; ²⁴ and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way" (Ps 139:23-24 NASB).

Hopefully, it will also challenge some of our hidden or secret preconceived ideas or prejudices, which we have as a community. To help us see this, a well-known character will be reviewed from a well-known story will be used.

¹ Ford, LeRoy. *Designed for Teaching and Training: A Self-Study Guide to Lesson Planning*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1978), 36.

1. My up's and down's

Q. So, what you do if God asked you to invite an enemy into your community, which may cause you to lose face within that community?

In this prophetic-narrative, God commanded a Prophet from Northern Israel to go northeast up to the capital city of the Assyrians.

¹ “The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ² Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jon 1:1-2 NASB).

However, he went south-west in the opposite direction. So, Jonah chooses to escape God by boarding a ship at Joppa and not another port on the Mediterranean coast of Israel. There were six principal harbours in the region, i.e. Gaza, Ashkelon, and Joppa (Jaffa) in the south; then Dor, Acco and Tyre in the north. Out of these only Joppa, a Dor, and Acco were in Israel. Of these ports, Joppa was possibly the deepest port so that it could take the largest ships.

Instead of the trip from Gath-Hepher to Nineveh, which was about 1200 km Jonah went to Tarshish. The main suggestion for the trip from Joppa to Tarshish, which was thought to be Tartessos in Spain, would have been about 4025 km.² However, there are some other suggestions for where Tarshish was, i.e.,

- Sardinia, Italy
- Tarsus, Cilicia (Asia Minor) modern Turkey
- Or it is a generic word for a very distant port



Jonah was not willing to go to the Assyrians, and it is capital Nineveh. The Assyrians were known for their cruelty of other people that they conquered. They were the current super-power of the day and saw everyone else as there to be taken over as their prize. This is one possible reason that Jonah disobeyed God and tried to go as far away as possible in the opposite direction.

² “Jonah – The Reluctant Prophet.” <https://thejordanvalley.com/2014/01/12/jonah/> (9th September 2020).

In Jonah 1:1, we are told that he was the son of Amittai. So, if that is the case, then it may be him who is mentioned as a prophet during the prosperous and expanding reign of Rehoboam II king of the northern tribes of Israel. His reign was for 41 years, that is he was coregent with his father Jehoash for 11 years from 793 - 782 BC, and then was king from 782 - 753 BC.³

²³ “In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam II the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria and reigned forty-one years. ²⁴ And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin ²⁵ He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-Hepher. ²⁶ For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, which was very bitter; for there was neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel (2 Kings 14:23-26 NASB).

The New Assyrian empire at the time was harassing the Northern tribes of Israel. They would take them into exile in the year 722 BC. Jonah prophet having been told by the Lord to go to Nineveh and cry out against their wickedness. However, he went the opposite way a ship heading towards Tarshish.

Notice the language of opposites, which is used to show this travelling in the opposite direction in the letter. That is,

The Lord said,

“Arise (i.e. get up), go (up, i.e. travel northeast) to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jon 1:2 NASB).

Jonah did get up, but to do the opposite,

“But Jonah rose up (it is the same word as used in v2 to arise) to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So, he went down to (the port of Joppa, modern Jaffa), found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD” (Jon 1:3 NASB).

“Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, laid down, and fallen sound (down into a deep) asleep” (Jon 1:5 NASB).

“So, the captain approached him (Jonah) and said, ‘How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, (it is the same word as used in v2 to arise) call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish’” (Jon 1:6 NASB).

Consequently, the Lord prepared certain events and events to teach Jonah a lesson because of his disobedience. In addition to this to get him to see how narrowminded his think and worldview had become. That is,

“And the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea, and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up” (Jon 1:4 NASB).

“And he said to them, ‘Pick me up and hurl (the same word as in v4) me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me, this great storm has come upon you’” (Jon 1:12 NASB).

“So, they picked up Jonah, hurled (the same word as in v4) him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging” (Jon 1:15 NASB).

³ “Jeroboam II.” <http://timeline.biblehistory.com/event/jeroboam-ii> (11th September 2020).

“And the LORD appointed (had already prepared) a great fish (the word for fish and not whale⁴) to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights” (Jon 1:17 NASB).

“So, the LORD God appointed (had already prepared) a plant, and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant” (Jon 4:6 NASB).

“But God appointed (had already prepared) a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant, and it withered” (Jon 4:7 NASB).

“And it came about when the sun came up that God appointed (had already prepared) a scorching east wind and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, ‘Death is better to me than life’” (Jon 4:8 NASB).

A side note,

Just a side note here. Many have called the book of Jonah fiction, a fable, an allegory, or a parable. However, interestingly, Jesus used this verse to talk about His time after His crucifixion when He was asked for a sign to prove who He was. That is,

³⁸ “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign (i.e. attesting miracle) from You.’ ³⁹ But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign (i.e. attesting miracle); and yet no sign (i.e. attesting miracle) will be given to it but the sign (i.e. attesting miracle) of Jonah the prophet; ⁴⁰ for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here” (Matt 12:38-41 NASB).

Jesus did not call this fiction, a fable, an allegory, or even a parable. However, He spoke about it as an event that had taken place, which affected real people. These real people repented and will stand at the judgement against these religious leaders. In addition to this, Jesus used the Queen of the South and Solomon in the same way. That is,

“The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here” (Matt 12:42 NASB).

So, if we use the logic of those who say that the story of Jonah is fiction, a fable, an allegory, or even a parable, then we need to do the same with the Queen of the South and even Solomon. That is, we cannot merely pick and choose, which section is real and, which is not real. **This ends the side note.**

Chapter two of the narrative is, in fact, in the style of poetry of a Psalm. Jonah had called out to the Lord from the stomach of the large fish that he was sorry and to be saved.

¹ “Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, ² and he said, ‘I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol (the place of the dead); You did hear my voice” (Jon 2:1-2 NASB)

Jonah was grateful for the Lord saving him,

“But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD” (Jon 2:9 NASB).

⁴ *The Jewish Study Bible*. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds). (New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2004), 1201.

So, we see Jonah being sent a second time with the same instruction,

¹ “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² ‘Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you’” (Jon 3:1-2 NASB).

We may notice that the Lord repeated the directive to Jonah which He had initially given him that is,

“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me” (Jon 1:2 NASB).

On this, it has been pointed out that,

“There is no reproach of the prophet’s former disobedience, but simply the quiet reiteration of the command.”⁵

Therefore, Jonah went to do the Lord’s will.

Having cried out to the Lord from the stomach of the fish, Jn 2:1-9; he repented of his rebellious attitude and was willing to obey. As a result, the fish vomited Jonah on the beach, Jon 2:10. Now can you imagine what Jonah would have looked like after spending three days and nights in the stomach of the fish? It has been said that,

“The ‘stomach acid’ working in all monogastric animals is hydrochloric acid, a very strong inorganic acid, which is produced by gastric glands (parietal cells). This acid is able to lower the pH in the stomach to levels between pH 1-3.”⁶

If that is the case, can you imagine what Jonah would have looked like coming out of the fish’s stomach? The acids would have probably bleached his body and hair, making him look white. Envision someone like this walking into the midst of a city and proclaiming God’s message,

³ “So, Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day walk. ⁴ Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, ‘Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown’” (Jon 3:3-4 NASB).

It is reminiscent of the account in Genesis of Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen 18:16-26. The Hebrew for ‘overthrown’ it is the same word that was used for the complete destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Except it did not end well for these two cities and its people. It had been suggested that Jonah’s message that, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown,” Jon 3:4, could imply the following ideas.

“Jonah’s words potentially carry two meanings: (a) ‘Nineveh is undone,’ and (b) Nineveh turns over (i.e., reforms itself).”

The result being that the people repented and fasted, turned from their evil ways and from the violence that was in their hand, Jon 3:5-9. This is like the sailors in Jon 1:10-14. Even the king gave a decree for them to fast and turn from their wickedness, which they did. As a result, God saw their works and that they had turned from their evil ways, and He did not bring the disaster on them, Jon 3:10.

⁵ *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs: Hebrew Text English Translation and Commentary*. 2nd Ed. J.H. Hertz (ed.). (London: Soncino Press, 1989), 968.

⁶ “The Fish Site.” <https://thefishsite.com/articles/acidification-in-monogastric-fish#:~:text=The%20E2%80%9Cstomach%20acid%E2%80%9D%20working%20in,levels%20between%20pH%201%2D3.> (10th September 2020).

Though Jonah was not happy with this result one bit. We are told that,

“But it greatly displeased (Lit. *trembled greatly*) Jonah, and he became angry (Lit. *to be hot*, i.e. *furious, burn*)” (Jon 4:1 NASB).

Jonah went on and protested with the Lord about the Ninevites repenting and then Him not punishing them.

“And he prayed to the LORD and said, ‘Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this, I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness (Heb. *chesed* pronounced *hesed*), and one who relents concerning calamity’” (Jon 4:2 NASB).

The phrase “slow to anger,” is a Hebrew idiom, which means “long of nose.” As Psalm 18:8 says that,

“Smoke (or *in His anger*) went up out of His nostrils,” and fire from His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it” (NASB).

Jonah overreacted and went on to say to the Lord,

“Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life” (Jon 4:3 NASB).

“Jonah may be picking up on God’s name that revealed to Moses. That is,

⁵ The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him (Moses) as he called upon the name of the Lord (or *he called out with the name of the Lord*). ⁶ Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth (or *faithfulness*); ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations” (Ex 34:5-7 NASB).

It is also, identical with a passage from the prophet Joel as he calls for repentance of the nation of Israel. That is,

“And rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil” (Joel 2:13 NASB).

If this the case, it just goes to show how Jonah knew his Scripture and especially the Torah and Psalms.

2. What you/we need is zero gravity thinking!

Q. Really, what right do you have to be so angry?

So, it appears that there was a real issue for Jonah with what the Lord had done. He was stuck in his thinking. Why should non-Israelites receive the Lord’s grace and compassion, no anger, His abundant lovingkindness and not get what is coming to them? He was part of the ‘in-group’, and they were the ‘out-group’. He was in a place where he was stuck in a certain way of doing community. He had built a fence around his community of northern Israel. He was feeling safe and protected from the ones outside who he thought were unsavoury or did not fit his guidelines of acceptance. He had an over-attachment to his idea of community, to the point that he became boxed in, in his opinions, thoughts and actions.

This is why it says in the text,

“But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry (Lit. to be hot, i.e. furious, burn)” (Jon 4:1 NASB).

We have seen that Jonah overreacted and went on to say to the Lord,

“Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life” (Jon 4:3 NASB).

This was due to his faulty perception of the way that the Lord sees and does things. How could the Lord do this, they are Assyrians, Ninevites, not Israelites? Therefore, Jonah was furious with the Lord regarding this matter.

The Lord saw things another way. He had given Jonah the privilege of being used by the Lord to go to the superpower of the day with His message and an opportunity to set things right and come into His community. However, Jonah could not see this amazing opportunity. The Lord tenderly asked Jonah the following question,

“And the LORD said, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry?’” (Jon 4:4 NASB).

The obvious answer would be no. Jonah still did not get it as we see in the next verse as he went out to the east of the city to wait to see what would happen to it. It has been pointed out that,

“...he (Jonah) was nevertheless reluctant to accept this conclusion and waited in the vicinity of the city with the illogical hope that the blow might fall.”⁷

But the Lord was about to give Jonah an object lesson on the way that he sees and thinks compared to the way the Lord sees things and thinks. His thinking was so much different to Jonah. The lesson would reveal Jonah’s hidden fears, biases, and prejudices, which were in his heart. As with David, the Lord would,

²³ “Search him and reveal his heart; try him and show him his anxious thoughts; ²⁴ and that there are hurtful ways in him, to be able to lead him in the everlasting way” (Ps 139:23-24 NASB).

Jonah was about to learn how the Lord wanted him to see and think about other people, who are to come into the Lord’s community. Jonah was meant to be a ‘zero-gravity thinker.’ On this of thinking it has been said that,

The image is from the following site.⁸

“There are two massive roadblocks to innovative thinking. They are so huge that most people, and even fewer churches, ever get past them. They are group-think and expert-think.”⁹

Whereas zero gravity thinking is

“A zero-gravity thinker is a person who has broken free from the weight and huge downward pull of group-think and expert-think. These innovative thinkers defy gravity by escaping from underneath the burden of what we already know. Zero gravity thinkers help us to reset the gravity levels in our team, church, or business by helping us to



⁷ *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 970.

⁸ “Zero Gravity Thinking.” <http://abigbluesky.blogspot.com/2010/03/zero-gravity-thinking.html> (9th September 2020).

⁹ “Zero Gravity Thinking.” <https://mydailyresolution.wordpress.com/2010/10/19/zero-gravity-thinking/> (9th September 2020). In his article he defines these two terms as follows: “Group-think is the power of what most people around us think. It is the crowd or herd mentality. Expert-think is what the experts around us think. It is group-think on steroids!”

attain a degree of weightlessness in our thinking. Whilst we welcome gravity in the physical world, we should not welcome it in our mental world. Gravity's job is to keep everything and everyone down, but what if the idea you need is up?"¹⁰

Notice, from the beginning in chapter one, soon as Jonah heard what the Lord wanted; he went down and down and down. In contrast, the Lord wanted him to go up, to experience weightlessness in his thinking as to long-held community fears, biases, and prejudices, which were in his heart. The Lord desired him to become an innovative thinker defying gravity by escaping from underneath these community burdens of what he already knew.

The only reason that Jonah was in the Lord's community was due to what Jonah had quoted back to Him. That is when he said,

"...for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity" (Jon 4:2b NASB).

This is the reason that he was part of the Lord's community because anything that he had done or could do. The Lord's object lesson to Jonah was on the way the He sees things and thinks. So, He used a plant to shade Jonah from the blistering sun and driving hot wind of the eastern desert. So, when the plant died, and Jonah was angry and wanted to die again, the Lord questioned him. He said to Jonah,

"Then God said to Jonah, 'Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?' And he said, 'I have good reason to be angry, even to death'" (Jon 4:9 NASB).

It would appear that Jonah had a bit of a temper, especially when things did not go his own way. He was a person who could throw a tantrum.

However, the Lord then brings Jonah to the heart of the matter of what He wanted Jonah to understand. That is, due to his self-centred attitude, he was very grateful for his own needs being met. He was only concerned for himself and his ways and people, i.e. his comfortable community. However, when this was threatened, he would even vent at the Lord. So, the Lord said to him,

"Then the LORD said, 'You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight'" (Jon 4:10 NASB).

The Lord did not see it or think about it like this. He saw things differently. Here is the crux of all of the narrative, namely the Lord said to him,

"And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jon 4:11 NASB).

This 120,000 people "who do not know the difference between their right and left hand," could be children, which make for a much bigger population. Or else it could be an Ancient Near East idiom for those who do not know the Lord's Kingdom of God right from wrong. The Lord was teaching Jonah "a lesson in mercy."¹¹ This was always the Lord's plan that through His chosen people, the other people groups would be blessed by coming into His community, Gen 12:1-3; Is 49:1-7. There were more than 120,000 to whom the Lord wanted to invite into His community. It has been said that,

¹⁰ "Zero Gravity Thinking." <https://mydailyresolution.wordpress.com/2010/10/19/zero-gravity-thinking/> (9th September 2020).

¹¹ Dorsey, David A. *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 290.

“The essential teaching is that the Gentiles (non-Israelites) *should not be grudged* God’s love, care and forgiveness. It is this grudging that is so superbly rebuked in throughout the Book, and most of all in the final chapter, which must rightly be considered the climax of the story.”¹²

The Lord gave Jonah the privilege to partner with Him in this venture. He wanted Jonah to be the one, the only one to take a message to this wild and vicious people to join in community with the Lord and Jonah. If he could have seen it, Jonah was the most successful prophet in the Old Testament, as the city repented after preaching once.

But Jonah just could not and did not what to see this idea. He was fenced in and comfortable in his cocoon. So, the Lord had to shake his world, take him out of his self-made comfort zone, take him to the point of death a couple of times and into a completely different culture. There was nothing left for Jonah the way that he knew it before; it was unprecedented for him. Why would the Lord do this kind of thing to him? So, that Jonah would become a zero-gravity thinker. To see and think about others as the Lord does.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. What could happen if we really grasped the idea that community is bigger than just me/us?

So, the idea of the community of us and we should not just be an ideal. It was meant to be the reality. We have seen how Jonah did not want to obey the Lord from the get-go. In contrast, the Lord wanted him to go up, to experience a weightlessness in his thinking to challenge some long-held community fears, biases, and prejudices, which were in his heart. The Lord desired him to become an innovative thinker defying gravity by escaping from underneath these community burdens of what he already knew. That is, a zero-gravity thinker.

What about you/us, what are some of our own community fears, biases, and prejudices, which were in our heart. Could it be that we have built a fence around our local church community? As a result, we now feel safe and protected from the ones outside who we think are unsavoury or do not fit our guidelines of acceptance. Have we got an over-attachment to our community, to the point that we are boxed in, in our opinions, thoughts and actions? Who is it that we would not allow into our little clique? It could be that we have built a fence around our community. Our local church community, or our city community, maybe even our state or nations community.

If they do not act or do things like us, well, they are not welcome. Maybe we are angry with those who are different from us because they do not do things our way, the Aussie way. Perhaps the Lord is saying to us,

“Do you have good reason to be angry?” (Jon 4:4 NASB).

Really, what right do you have to be so angry? The amount of biased, hurtful, harmful, and downright un-Christlike things that are said in the name of Christ is shameful. We condemn our leaders when they do not do it the way that we think they should when it affects us or ours. We toll and slam others on social media because they,

“They greatly displease ~~Jonah~~ us, and ~~he~~ we become ~~became~~ angry (Lit. to be hot, i.e. furious, burn)” (Jon 4:1 NASB).

We are so white-hot in a fury sometimes that we murder people in our thoughts, and then our words. We do this all in the name of being an ~~Israelite~~ Christ-follower. Shame on us, this is not Christ! As the Lord says to Jonah, He says to us today,

¹² *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 964.

“And should I not have compassion on ~~Nineveh~~ Australia, Victoria, Melbourne, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula, your neighbours in this great city in which there are more than ~~120,000~~ many, many persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (Jon 4:11 NASB).

How would you answer the following?

- What would it be like if as a community of Christ-followers, we took down our fences, which we have put up to allow those in who, well would not be our first choice?
- What would happen if as Christ-followers, we became zero-gravity thinkers as a local part of God’s community-led by compassion instead of anger, bias, and prejudice?

Which leads up back to our main question:

- **What could happen if we really grasped the idea that community is bigger than just me/us?**