

Saturday, November 25, 2017 - Day 328 – Jonah 4, Psalm 119:33-72, Matt 22

The prophet Jonah is quite angry. Seems his message to the people of Nineveh has been heeded, and quickly heeded. He delivered the same message to the people of Israel, multiple times, with no results! How can it be that a city of Gentiles heeds and is saved from destruction and his own people ignore him? Things just aren't turning out the way Jonah would like. So much so that he asks God to end his life.

Being a compassionate God means being compassionate towards all people, not just those of Israel. Jonah either doesn't understand this, or does and is annoyed that God is saving Gentiles. Why would God do such a thing Jonah must be wondering. I've been there, asking God in anger, "Why?" (Usually it's after an Eagles game.) When we see ourselves in the bad behavior of others we need to take a step back and remind ourselves that our compassionate God is a God of all people, not just those we identify with, or prefer.

The words of Psalm 119 contain a number of wonderful prayers that remind us of the importance of following of God's commandments/statutes/decrees/etc. There are five separate prayers within this reading, all somewhat similar in intention. We may hear some of Jonah in these verses:

- 38: "Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you."
- 53: "Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, those who forsake your law."

It takes constant prayer to keep ourselves in that place of knowing and following the teachings of our faith. When we may briefly fall away from prayer, we can feel the difference in ourselves. I know I do. There are verses in 119 that sum up a good piece of my life:

- 67: "Before I was humbled I went astray, but now I keep your word."
- 71-72: "It is good for me that I was humbled, so that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

Like some of you, I was once caught up not in the word of God, but the illusion of wealth and possessions; of thinking that I was the one in control. Funny how God will allow you to go down that path for a while waiting for you to realize there's a better way. But if you've experienced that path, you know how empty it is, and how rich and fulfilling life with God is; how being humble allows closeness with God.

It is when we see ourselves in scripture that we are reminded and pulled back to live according to God's decrees/commandments/statutes. And to hold love at the center as in Matthew 22.

In Matthew 22 we have the greatest commandment – love the lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; and the second – love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Not exactly where Jonah was in chapter 4; not exactly where I had been in my life. And as simple and as clear as the words of Matthew sound, they are most difficult to follow. I'm sure we all have had moments when we did not love others, or did not love God with our entire being. But the prayers of Psalm 119 can bring us back to live our lives as God intended.

God's peace and blessings as we enter Advent.

By The Rev. Karen Kaminskas