

# “It’s Not About You”

## Jonah and God’s Mission, Pt. 4

Jonah 4:1-11

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Rev. Peter Smith

### Introduction

*Wherever it is, from there it must go  
For wherever it is, to there it went.  
Whoever received it, from him it must go.  
For whoever brought it, with him it was sent.*

Today is World Mission Sunday for the Anglican Church in North America. Each year on the 2nd to last Sunday in Epiphany we’re called to focus on the task of taking the Gospel to the world. Now, we’ve spent the majority of Epiphanytide on that very topic, but today is the culmination.

For the Gospel to go out it involves prayer, and preaching, and evangelization, and financial giving, and works of mercy, and miraculous ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, and it involves going. There is so much that *could* be done! The opportunities we have are endless. There is so much that *must* be done! The responsibility we have is immense.

As a church, we need to often think about what missions says about God and what it says about us. And we need to regularly re-commit ourselves to the call we have to be on mission. Because the thrust of missions is always outwards...but we are so prone to inwardness

With that said, it’s a tremendous blessing to be a part of a province that believes in the priority of world missions. Many of us in this room have experience in churches which mock mission work and evangelism as something crude or insensitive, or even unnecessary. “Go ahead: build schools and hospitals, help the poor, advocate for the oppressed---just don’t try to save souls.” Others of us have experience in churches which downplay the work of societal transformation. “Go ahead and save souls--just don’t waste time on all those people’s temporal problems.”

Well, we here at Living Faith and in the Anglican Church in North America are about the both/and, not either/or. Christ came to redeem the whole of humanity, the mind, body, and spirit of people from every tribe and nation. This has been our focus from Epiphany Sunday until now

### The Story of Jonah: Recap

And so by now you should know this: the message of Epiphany is that God in Christ is the Savior of all people. This is the impetus for God’s mission throughout the whole Bible, and we’ve been looking at God’s mission specifically in the book of Jonah. From Jonah chapter 1 we learned that: It’s a dangerous thing to draw lines between who is on the inside and who is on the outside when it comes to being a part of God’s people. From Jonah chapter 2 we said that: God hears and responds to the repentant prayers of human beings.

Last Sunday we covered Jonah chapter 3. Jonah finally obeyed God’s call to be a missionary to Ninevah and he called the city to repent. And they did. The whole city. Everyone. Jonah’s ministry in God’s mission helped save a city, in spite of himself. And we said that the big idea for chapter 3 was: God can work immediate and widespread repentance in the lives of those we think are the hardest to reach

Well, here we are at Jonah chapter 4, ready to wrap up this missionary story. Let’s turn to the text: Jonah 4:1-11---you can find that in the sermon handout or in the Bibles in the seats.

### Exposition

The last verse of chapter 3--v. 10--says: "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it." Well, chapter 4 begins immediately with v. 1: "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry." This is such a sharp juxtaposition: God's merciful forgiveness is in sharp contrast to Jonah's judgmental anger. Jonah is "exceedingly" angry because God did not destroy the city. Anything would have sufficed: God could have sent fire and brimstone like on Sodom and Gomorrah, or he could have buried it under rubble like Jericho. But God didn't do either of those things.

And ultimately Jonah didn't expect God to. But that was the problem!! This is what he himself says in v. 2: "That's the very reason I ran away to Tarshish to begin with, because I know that you are a gracious and merciful God, and that if I went to Nineveh to preach your Word that you were going to spare 'those people'." It looks like God's prophet didn't have the change of heart that we hoped he did. He probably could have used some more time in fish's stomach."

Jonah is so angry with God's love for the Ninevites that he wants to die. V. 3: "O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." Finally God responds in v. 4, and given the whole narrative of the book of Jonah and how pouty Jonah is, God's response is quite gracious: He says: "Do you do well to be angry?"

Have you ever been told something that you know is true, but you're too angry to acknowledge it, so you don't say anything at all? Well Jonah doesn't entertain God's question. In fact, v. 5 says he leaves the city and goes and makes a "booth" to mope under.

Now, I would imagine that a city which repented at the words of God's prophet would be more than happy to be hospitable to that same prophet. I would suspect that they might have offered him housing, and food, and drink, and comfort for as long as he wanted. But no, Jonah gets out of dodge. Instead of remaining inside the city walls among people who had just become insiders in God's Kingdom, he opts to go outside. And there under his makeshift covering he waits to see what will happen to the city.

The king of Nineveh asked the question in ch. 3:9: "Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." Well, here Jonah, seems to be hoping for something quite different: "Who knows? God may turn and relent from his love and mercy, so that the Ninevites might perish."

Well again, despite his ridiculous attitude God demonstrates grace for Jonah. Here Jonah is, sitting to the east of Nineveh, out in the sun, waiting and hoping for the fire of God to fall from heaven. But, poor Jonah is uncomfortable. He's hot. The sun is beating down on him. So, In. v. 6, it says that God made a plant to grow up out of the ground, so that it gave Jonah shade and comfort. Now, I don't know if you know this but plants don't usually grow that fast. God made it happen, and Jonah would have understood that. And Jonah becomes "exceedingly" glad, in contrast to the "exceeding" anger which he felt earlier in v. 1.

Well evidently, Jonah spent the night there under the plant, because v. 7 says that dawn came the next day. And before the sun arose, God does something peculiar. In the same way that God appointed a plant to grow up to comfort Jonah, he here appoints a worm to discomfort Jonah by destroying the plant. And more than that, God takes it up a notch by appointing a scorching wind in v. 8.

So without any shade, under the heat of the sun and faced with a scorching wind from the east, Jonah gets suicidal again. He says the same thing that he said in v. 3: "It is better for me to die than to live." So, in v. 9, God repeats the same question that he asked Jonah in v. 4, but that Jonah never answered. God asks: "Do you do well to be angry, [this time] for the plant?" And this time Jonah does answer God: "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die!"

Well, in the last 2 verses of the book, God gives the punchline to this lesson he wants to teach Jonah, and it turns out to be the punchline for the whole book. God says: "You have pity for a plant. I pity 120,000 people, and also the cows!" [It's such a funny way to end the book--"and also many cattle"---and yet it demonstrates God's heart for his creation]. Jonah didn't create the plant, God did. And all the plant did was give Jonah temporary comfort. But Jonah was furious that God had destroyed it. God created the Ninevites, not Jonah.

And the people of the city were created to give God glory eternally. But Jonah was furious that God had NOT destroyed them.”

## What’s Going On In This Passage?

This leads us to the Big Idea of ch. 4: **It’s not about you, it’s about God’s heart for them.** Jonah obeyed God, didn’t he? His discharged his missionary duty. But while Jonah might have technically “obeyed,” his heart remained 1) self-absorbed and 2) hostile to the people he was sent to reach

God’s mission to the city of Ninevah was never about Jonah, it was always about God’s heart for the Ninevites. And from the beginning of the book to the end, Jonah never gets it. It didn’t matter that Jonah didn’t want to go to Ninevah. It didn’t matter that Jonah didn’t like the Ninevites. It didn’t matter that Jonah had to leave his home country and his family in order to go. It didn’t matter that Jonah’s life might have been threatened by entering the city. It didn’t matter whether Jonah was successful or not. It didn’t matter whether Jonah was comfortable or not. It didn’t matter whether Jonah was happy or not. It didn’t matter whether Jonah anything! Because it was ALWAYS and ONLY about God’s heart for the Ninevites.

Now this never meant that God didn’t care about Jonah too. Of course he did! Remember Jonah’s praise and thanksgiving to God in chapter 2? God loved him, God delivered him.

The problem is that Jonah believed he was more important in God’s eyes than other people. And in doing so, he acted as if he was more important in God’s eyes than God himself. This is fundamentally why Jonah was so angry when God saved the people he hated. Because on Jonah’s hierarchy of importance, Jonah is sitting pretty at the top in the #1 position, God comes in at a close second in the #2 slot, and the Ninevites didn’t even make it on the chart. As if it wasn’t clear already, we see this when God destroyed the plant that Jonah loved so much. Jonah was angry that 1) God killed the plant, and 2) that God DID NOT kill the Ninevites. In other words, He was more concerned with his own temporary comfort than the eternal condition of 120,000 people. But we would never do anything like that, right?!

## Missions and the Example of Christ

Missions **is not and never has been about us, it’s about God’s heart for them.** We have the example of this set for us in the Godhead itself, for it is God’s Mission after all. The Apostle Paul describes this in that beautiful hymn from Philippians chapter 2: Jesus Christ left his throne, He humbled himself, He took on human flesh, He went to a people who were not his own, He became the servant of those people, He preached to them, He ministered to them in the power of the Spirit, He made disciples of them, and eventually they killed him. But God raised him from the dead, and in all of this, God the Father has been seeking that every knee bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Jesus was a missionary, albeit God himself. And yet Jesus was willing to say: “It’s not about me, Father, it’s about Your heart for them.” This is why Jesus can make a claim upon our lives to be missionaries. Because He never asks us to do anything that he wasn’t willing to do. So when Jesus tells his Apostles to: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.---He’s saying: “Join in. Imitate me.”

## Hide and Seek

As a child I really enjoyed playing hide and seek. And you’ve probably played this at one point or another. One person--who is called “the seeker”--closes his eyes and counts while everyone else goes and hides. Once the seeker is done counting, he opens his eyes and goes to look for everyone and tag them. The last person to be found wins the game

I was pretty good at hiding and was usually fast enough to get back to home base before being tagged by the seeker. But for me, the worst part about hide and seek was when I was found and tagged by the seeker and then I had nothing to do until the end of the game. Seconds turned into minutes. And minutes felt like hours. And all that time I had to wait knowing that I had lost the game and there was nothing that I could do about it.

But there's a better variation of hide and seek. There's still one seeker to begin with, and every else hides. But instead of just losing and having nothing to do when you get found, those who get found by the seeker then help the seeker find everyone else.

This is how God's Mission works. When Jesus calls you to himself, he then sends you out as his co-missionary. Charles Spurgeon goes so far as to say: "Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor. Whew! If we're not participating in mission, we're still trying to play the wrong version of hide and seek.

## How Do We Do it?

Well, now I want to get really practical. If we are all called to be on mission with God: How is it that we can actually participate on a daily basis? How can we say to God daily: "It's not about me, God, it's about your heart for them."

Well, for the past several weeks, I've been saying that we all have opportunities to pray, to give, to go, and to send. I'd like to talk about how we can be a part of those things in a missional way.

First, **Praying Missionally**. This is the most accessible way to join in on God's mission, and it is by no means the least significant. There are as many possibilities for how we can contribute to the work of mission in this way as there are words to pray. We know that praying missionally is something God calls us to because Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 9:37-38: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." So pray: Ask God to raise up more missionaries. But don't stop there.

Pray that he would give *you* a desire to be on mission. Pray that God would fill you with power from his Holy Spirit as a minister. Pray for opportunities to share the Gospel in your neighborhood or workplace. Pray for specific missionaries you know around the world. Pray for specific nations. [There's a book called *Operation World* which explains where each nation of the world is in terms of the spread of the Gospel. This is an incredibly useful tool for targeted prayer.] Pray for specific unreached people groups. [You can go to [JoshuaProject.net](http://JoshuaProject.net) to see all 7,035 people groups who still don't have the Gospel. Pick one and pray]. Pray by yourself or, even better, pray with a group. [Our missional prayer group here at the church will soon start meeting on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month to ask God for revival and evangelization in the world. Join in.]

In Psalm 2:8, the Lord says: "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." Let's not forget to be busy asking God for the nations.

Second, **Giving Missionally**. In the booklet I handed out last Sunday--10 Principles on Giving--the 10th principle was: "Giving to the work of missions is essential to fulfilling the Great Commission." This is something our Bishop--Bishop Keith--believes and lives. Each church in our diocese--the Diocese of Western Anglicans--is expected to give 10% of its tithes and offerings to the diocese for the work of ministry on the diocesan level. But, the next 10% of the diocesan budget is meant to go to the work of missions, outreach, and evangelism.

This model is something Kristie and I have been working towards personally. We've always tithed 10% of our gross income to the local church. But we've increased the percentage of our giving by 1% for every year that we've been married, and everything above our 10% tithe goes specifically to the work of missions specifically.

I'd like our church to work towards that same model: we already give 10% to the diocese, but I want us to grow towards giving the next 10% to the work of mission both here and to the ends of the earth. And thanks be to God, we're really close to that goal.

Bishop Keith talks about making sure our bank accounts have been baptized along with the rest of us. If God can help us to get over ourselves in this way--to recognize that it's not about us, but that it's about God's heart for them--it's amazing how much more freely we can give: to support foreign missionaries, to help impoverished children, to fight human trafficking, to care for refugees, and all in Jesus' name and for His glory.

Third, **Going Missionally**. In order for missions to happen, there must be goers. There must be Isaiahs who say: "Here I am, send me." And there's simply not enough of them.

The whole world needs the Gospel: world A, world B, and world C. But remember, world B and world C both have access to the Gospel already. In world A, if no one goes then the Gospel will never be heard!

Now there are two ways to "Go missionally." The first way is to "go" while you stay exactly where you are. People from the nations--even world A nations--are coming right here to us. According to the 2014 census there are 42.4 million foreign-born immigrants living in the United States from the majority of nations in the world. Arizona has roughly 1 million of those foreign-born immigrants, for a state with less than 7 million people. Most of those foreign-born immigrants--650,000--are in the Phoenix metro area. 13,000 international students from 150 countries attend ASU. My upstairs neighbors are Muslims from Syrians who fled the war. My next-door neighbors are Muslims from Turkey who are here on asylum. We can actually "go" to these people with the Gospel, just by being intentional with the way we live our lives here: being hospitable, extending love, taking time out of our busy lives to invite others into it, being bold to introduce them to the true Jesus.

The second way is to leave where you are and to go where there is need. This kind of going isn't something that God calls all of us to do. It wouldn't make sense if he did. But I'm convinced that God calls far more people to go in this way than actually obey him.

Have you ever asked God if he wants you to go on mission? Do you have practical skills (like being a lawyer, or a doctor, or a CPA) that God could use to support his work of mission around the world? Can God put your spiritual gifts of mercy, or teaching, or evangelism to use on his Mission? Have you ever considered retiring to the mission field, instead of taking it easy? "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few"---Could you help change that?

Fourth, **Sending Missionally**. In order for missions to happen Christians must go. But in order for them to go, they must be SENT. When God calls a missionary to go to another nation, it requires the local community to support that person. Yet, too few churches are sending churches. But, we don't have to be one of them

We can be a sending church. We can raise up missionaries to go to the unreached. We can energize and resource those who are active in the work of mission here in Phoenix. We can care for those who are wounded in the work of mission. We can encourage those who are planting seeds and struggling to see the fruit.

We already have a number of people in our congregation who are connected to the work of global missions through Frontiers. We also have a number of people in our congregation are already actively involved in ministry to the unreached at ASU and around the city. How can we support, encourage, and, even, join these people?

## Conclusion

The story of Jonah teaches us that our self-absorption puts us at cross-purposes with God's Cross-purpose. **God's mission is not about you, it's about God's heart for them.**

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