

## Lenten Devotional February 17, 2021

### Scripture

Jonah 3:1-4:11

*1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, 2 "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. 6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. 8 Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. 9 Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." 10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. 4:1 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. 3 And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" 5 Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. 6 The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. 7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." 10 Then the LORD said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"*

### Devotional

#### The Rev. Paul Leone '90

"The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.'" I am writing this reflection while practicing social distancing, wearing a mask in public, and churches worship virtually in response to a virus that has literally sickened to death this globe.

Concurrently, a pandemic of another sort has shaken this country to its core—a disease unveiled by a video of a dying black man gasping for air. In angry response, a collective "Jonah" (protestors and demonstrators) has taken to the streets of Nineveh (think Minneapolis and beyond) proclaiming a message: "I can't breathe," "Get your knee off our necks," "No justice, no peace."

"Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'" Day after day the voice of the people in our city streets has grown larger and louder. The sin and wickedness they rail against? Racism, discrimination, and police brutality.

God's message through Jonah stirred the hearts and minds of the people of Nineveh. "They proclaimed a fast and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth." Even the King of Nineveh rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. What is *our* country doing? Will God's message through the collective street voice stir the hearts and minds of national, state, and local government? Will our leaders heed the prophetic word "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Will this commitment infiltrate the decisions, policies, and reform desperately needed?

Further, what are we as individual Christians doing? Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of 40 in this season of Lent, which takes its name from the imposition of ashes on the foreheads of worshipers as a sign of human sin and mortality. Are we sincere when we pray, with the psalmist, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). Do we take seriously *both* parts of Jesus' call to "Repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15)?

I heard a black man telling his children they are in danger, not because of anything they have done, but because of the color of their skin. He said, "The skin is the sin." Let *all* of us remember—we are dust, and to dust we shall return (Gen. 3:19b).

#### **Prayer**

"Breathe on us, breath of God, fill us with life anew, that we may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do." Amen.