Sermon: Obedience in Mission
Series: Mercy Beyond Boundaries
Text: Jonah 3:1-10
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Story about workboots?

- Had them since Roatan trip when I was like 17 years old
- They're mostly dirty from dust not from work - but pretend

Growing up my image of a pastor was that they dressed up, spent all week praying in a closet (unless they were visiting someone), they came out, preached, and then did it all over again.
Needless to say I didn't want to be a pastor growing up. How I got here is an amazing story for another time, but let me say that I'm glad to be here and I feel called to be doing what I'm doing.

Anyways… back to the boots.

When we get to Jonah chapter 3, we don't see a polished, professional, perfect prophet, we see a prophet who to be honest is messy and messed up.

If you've been with us for the past couple of weeks we've been following the journey of Jonah. Two weeks ago, Pastor Steve started us off with a prophet who went in the opposite direction of where God told him to go. Last week, Pastor Andrew talked about his adventures inside a fish - as he said - there was nothing fishy about it :)

Today we look at what happens AFTER Jonah is vomited out of a great fish.

We're going to look at how:

1. **God is the God of second chances**
2. **Obedience doesn't have to be impressive**
3. **God works where we least expect**
4. **God loves a repentant heart**

We'll connect it to Jesus and then have some challenges for the week.

**Jonah 2:10 - And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**

When the people saw him, they must have been wailing :)

Seriously though - picture this. Jonah is standing on the beach. He smells like seaweed and acid. One of my study Bibles was saying that the stomach acids of the fish might

have literally bleached his skin and hair. So imagine how he would look - messy, tired and probably feeling all the emotions.

This is the scene we find ourselves in when we read Jonah chapter 3

1. **God is the God of second chances**

**Jonah 3:1-2 - Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”**

The title of this series is “Mercy Beyond Boundaries” - obviously it’s challenging us to go outside our comfort zones and our boundaries and show mercy to others.

Before we get to that though, we have to start with the mercy God shows to us. Let’s look at Jonah. There’s so much mercy here. One of my Bibles challenged me to remember that God is the God of second chances. Abraham lied in Egypt - God restarted his story. Jacob was a deceiver - God wrestled with him until he became the father of Israel. Peter denied Jesus three times on the worst night in history - Jesus met him on a beach and said, “follow me.” To the woman at the well Jesus said he doesn’t condemn her.

God doesn’t get rid of Jonah. Even though he failed to do what God called him to do the first time. Even though he ran in the opposite direction. He nearly got sailors killed. Yet “The word of the LORD came to Jonah a SECOND time.”

Jonah is restored. Some people think that failure disqualifies them forever but that’s not the case. Maybe you’re here today or you're watching online and you think your story is over because you’ve messed up - small time, big time - whatever. Your story is not over. All through the Bible we have stories of misfits and people who don’t always get it right. They don’t look like the obvious choice - But God chooses them. Those who messed up, those who were discouraged, those who were uneducated, those who were broken… When the Israelites were at the Red Sea and it looked like there was no way - God made a way. God has a way that no one could have expected.

**God is the God of second chances.**

On the other hand, we shouldn’t play around with the grace and mercy of God thinking that because he is so merciful we can just go around sinning and not caring. So be careful. Maybe some of you need to hear that.

It always strikes me how God is just as concerned with the worker as the work. Maybe even more so.

Jonah is called to, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

Jonah still gets the same call from God. One of my commentaries was talking about how Nineveh was massive for its size - about 120, 000 people. Jerusalem at the time was around 30, 000. Nineveh was said to be the capital of the Assyrian empire. As Andrew said last week, it was also said to be quite evil. Some say it was one of the most evil civilizations ever. So evil, I won’t even mention some of the things they did to those they conquered. So Jonah doesn’t like them for a reason.

It was considered great because of its size, its imposing will on others - but also because of God’s heart for it.

God sees things as great that others might not.

Like Gideon - God sees him as a mighty warrior. He sees himself as the least in his clan.
David - youngest of his brothers - God sees him as a king and deliverer of Israel.

Paul - was chasing Christians and putting them in prison - God saw one of the greatest missionaries and writer of the so much of the New Testament.
You - you see yourself as… but God sees you as…

How powerful would it be for God to redeem a place like Nineveh? A place of such brokenness? What a witness to God's goodness for everyone to see his grace, love and restoration. It ends up showing up in the Ninevites - which we're looking at today - but also in Jonah - which we'll look at next week.

**God is the God of second chances.**

2. **Obedience doesn't have to be impressive**

**3:3-4 - Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."**

I've preached on this passage before, talked about it in Pursuit youth group, Christian schools and camp. Usually I talk about how Jonah kinda steps in the city, mumbles a short message and prays nothing happens - he secretly (or maybe not so secretly) WANTS them to be destroyed.

We tend to focus on Jonah's bad attitude. In Hebrew, his sermon is five words long.

(It was at this point that someone in the congregation elbowed the person beside them and said - too bad this guy's sermon wasn't five words amiright :)

Let's cut Jonah a little slack today. Perhaps his heart wasn't fully there - we'll hear more about that next week as we wrap up the series. In the moment, think about the fact that he showed up. He walks into one of the most violent places on earth at the time and announces that God is going to destroy them in 40 days. That's it. No hope - just destruction. If I were Jonah, I'd be a little nervous about how they would take it. But he goes. He gives the message that God tells him to give.

Sometimes we make obedience more difficult than it actually is. Small steps still count. Even if you're scared - do it scared. It's okay to not feel confident. The confidence comes from the fact that God asked you. Not your ability. Maybe you think you don't know enough or you're not ready or you're not gifted enough. We don't have to be creative all the time. Sometimes we just have to be faithful.

Think about Ananias in Acts chapter 9. God tells Ananias to go and see Saul. Saul at the time was on a mission to arrest and persecute Christians. Ananias understandably had some pushback. In the end he goes. He blesses Saul and heals him. That faithful act helps to launch Saul - who we know as Paul - into ministry.

God changes the world through ordinary obedience. God makes the ordinary - extraordinary.

Our job is obedience. God's job is the outcome. When God calls, we often don't get the full picture or all the steps. Often we just get the first step.

**Obedience doesn't have to be impressive**

3. **God works where we least expect**

You wanna talk about a plot twist?

**3:5 - The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.**

Nobody expected the Ninevites to respond like this. Especially Jonah. One of the commentaries I read had an intriguing thought. It said that the text switches from God's

covenant name - “LORD” which is YHWH - the personal proper name of the Israelite God -  to “Elohim” which is the Hebrew general name for deity or God So, it’s not like the Ninevites had all this experience and revelation and relationship with God. It seems like all they had was Jonah - whose miraculous whale story probably preceded him. God had Jonah meet them where they were at, speaking their language, and coming into their context - not from his Hebrew context - there’s a little clue in there about a way to approach others who are different from us. Maybe Jonah had more to his sermon than this and what we have is all that’s recorded… either way - they respond with extreme repentance. Ironically, more than Israel has shown. Making Jonah perhaps the most successful prophet ever :)

This one, short sermon causes an entire city to repent. If you go on to read the next verses, it’s not only the people, it’s even the animals. Kinda weird to us, but it was common in that culture in that time to have animals join in to show sincerity.

Look at the king:

**3:6 - When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal**

**robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.**

He steps off his throne - almost like he was saying that he recognizes that there is a power greater than him.

He takes off his royal clothes - very humble.

He covers himself in sackcloth - super uncomfortable robe made of coarse pig hair - something like those old bags people use to do potato sack relays in - oh yeah, it's called a potato sack. He humbles himself all the way down to the lowest person. Also a sign of grief.

He sits down in the dust - seems to be totally submissive.

I know this is a little detour but imagine what it would be like if the leaders of our city, province, country, world were able to be humble like this?

Let's take 20 seconds and throw up a quick prayer for at least one leader - could be here locally or in the world - no I mean do it right now :)

In the African Bible Commentary it was saying that their response hints at our innate spiritual nature and responsiveness. We are made to worship. We are made to

be in a relationship with God. The king and Ninevites didn't have all the theology, all the experiences of the Israelites - but ironically, they responded with more sincere repentance.

What about you?

Have you ever thought that it was pointless to keep praying for or reaching out to a person? A leader? A nation? Like they are too far gone? Too evil? Jonah writes off Nineveh. God doesn't.

**God works where we least expect.**

**Vs. 9 - Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.**

We'll talk more about this next week but Jonah's biggest struggle wasn't that he doubted God's power, it was that he knew that God was a God of mercy beyond boundaries.

If we are trying to build bridges across differences and have Cornerstone Centre as a hub where strangers find belonging, we have to deal with our own internal resistance to people who are different from us or who we

think are unforgivable.  What about people who don't fit in? You may not have an arch nemesis but maybe you actually struggle more with discomfort than outright unforgiveness. Who makes you uncomfortable? What type of people don't you like?

It might be easy for us to judge Jonah. But what would you do if you were in a situation where you were confronted by your enemies? What would you do if you were confronted by someone who had done evil?

One of the most moving examples of this is Corrie ten Boom. After surviving a concentration camp where her sister died, she was speaking in Germany about the reality of God's forgiveness. A former guard from the camp was in the crowd. He had become a Christian. She recognized him, but he didn't recognize her. After the talk he came up to her and extended his hand. He thanked her for the talk, explained that he felt God's forgiveness but could he have hers?

How could she shake his hand? How could she let go of all that had happened to her? Her sister? She couldn't do it. She prayed. She realized in that moment that forgiveness is not an emotion. It's an act of the will. She prayed. Later she wrote that as she extended her hand, God's love flooded her heart.

Sometimes mission begins with forgiving the people we would rather avoid.That's what we see in God. That's what we see in Jesus.

If we go back to our Jonah story we'll wind down with verse 10

**Vs.10 - When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.**

4. **God loves a repentant heart**

God saw lives that were repentant. Repentance is when you are acting one way and then you turn from that way and go in a different direction. The Ninevites had no guarantee that God would forgive them and not destroy them, but they hoped for mercy. They fasted, humbled themselves and stopped their violent ways.

God relented - a good way of looking at the Hebrew in Jonah's message is that word overthrown can be translated turned over or turned around. Because they turned around, they were not turned over.

God prefers repentance over judgment. Listen to these words from **2 Peter 3:9b**

**… He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance**

**John 3:16 says - For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life**

Jonah spent three days in the belly of a whale.
Jesus spent three days in the belly of the earth.
Jonah brought a message.
Jesus IS the message.
Jonah announced judgment.
Jesus took judgment on himself.
Jonah reluctantly offered mercy.
Jesus joyfully offers us mercy.

God loves a repentant heart

Are you like the Ninevites? Do you need to repent and change your ways? What is one habit, one place where you're bitter, one place where you have a prejudice, one place where you need to step down off your throne, humble yourself and ask God to have mercy on you?

God is a merciful God and will forgive you.

Are you like Jonah?
Is God asking you to have a difficult conversation, is he asking you to serve somewhere, mentor someone, reconcile a relationship?
Is there a person or a group of people at school, at camp, at work, on your street, in your family that you need to show mercy to? Pray for that person or group of people by name this week. Ask God to align your heart with his.

Don't wait until you're ready. Take one small step this week. Stop waiting until your faith is perfect, stop waiting for your motivations to be 100% pure. God used Jonah's five word sermon to change a nation. Even though Jonah wasn't fully in it, he still was obedient. What about you? One of the studies I read said - "God does world-changing things through people who feel hesitant but choose to obey anyway."

What's the message God has given you to share with someone this week?

Let's pray.