

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever. Amen.

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. ⁴ On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

⁶ When the news 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. ⁷ Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

¹ But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ But the LORD replied, “Have you any right to be angry?” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Friends,

There once was a chicken and a pig that were friends. The chicken suggested that they open a restaurant together and the pig asked what they would call it. The chicken suggested, “Ham and Eggs.” The pig said, “I don’t think so.” For you its just a contribution but for me it’s a total commitment.

“Following Christ Calls for a Total Commitment.” As we consider this portion of scripture we want to take a look at **“Jonah’s Commitment,” “Nineveh’s Commitment,”** and **“The Results of their Commitments.”**

I. Jonah was a prophet or messenger of God who served the Northern Tribes of Israel during a rather prosperous time in their history. But God had a special assignment for Jonah. He wanted Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh, a rather godless city, and preach a message of judgment.

Jonah had been happy to serve the Children of Israel but all of a sudden God was asking him to do something he really didn’t want to do. It doesn’t appear that he was afraid. He just didn’t think the people of Nineveh deserved to hear God’s Word and so he headed the other direction. He tried to run away from God. How foolish is that?

You can’t run and hide from God and so God got Jonah’s attention with a fierce storm and a big fish. Jonah ended up in the stomach of a big fish for three days. What a miserable place to be! But during those three days, Jonah realized how committed God was to him, he repented of his sin and promised to follow God’s command. The fish vomited Jonah onto dry ground and he

headed for Nineveh. He had some time to think about what had happened and his commitment to God because he had about 600 miles to travel by foot and it probably took a month to get to Nineveh.

We're not told anything about the journey but scripture notes, **"Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days."** This was a powerful city of about 500,000 people. The wall surrounding the city was 100 feet high in places and wide enough for three chariots to travel side-by-side along the top. This was the center of culture for the Assyrians and the city where the king of Assyria resided. We might think of it as the New York or London of it's time. It was also an important city to God because he was sending Jonah with his message. It was going to take three days for Jonah to spread his message to the whole city.

The message was quite simple, **"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."** Forty more days – a time of grace. That's the good news – the gospel portion of this message. But if you don't change your ways and repent Nineveh will be overturned – destroyed – words of judgment and destruction – the Law. To put it another way, "Repent or die." Jonah might have included just a little more but this was the heart of the message. Jonah proclaimed it just as the Lord commanded and he let the Word work. He didn't think about the results. That was up to God.

There are times when we are like Jonah. We're committed to God until we run into a command of God we don't like. We do just the opposite of what God wants us to do and in effect run away from God – try to hide or hope he doesn't notice. But, just like God cared for Jonah and the people of Nineveh, so he also cares for each one of us. He knows what is going through our minds and he knows every detail of our lives. Sometimes he allows storms to arise in our lives to get our attention, just as he did with Jonah. And sometimes, like Jonah, we are stubborn and try to argue with God – justify what we are doing. But God is patient with us. He is more committed to us than we are to him and we are thankful for that because only God can bring us forgiveness and peace. Only God can get us going in the right direction again.

Jonah didn't know what kind of reaction he would get as he proclaimed God's message in Nineveh. These people were fierce and cruel warriors and could have easily rejected the message and killed Jonah, but God worked through the message proclaimed by Jonah. I think Jonah was quite surprised by Nineveh's reaction to the Word and their commitment to God.

II. "5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 6 When the news 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." The Word did its work! The people of Nineveh believed. The Lord gave them 40 days but the word spread quickly and the people repented. From the greatest to the least – from the king to the lowliest slave there was a change of heart. They all put on sackcloth to indicate their sorrow for their sins. And the king gave this decree, **"By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."**

The King understood the seriousness of sin. To show their sorrow everyone and every animal would be covered in itchy coarse sackcloth and would fast. I would imagine that after a few hours the noise from the animals would be quite loud. And yet that fit with the cry for mercy from the people as they urgently called on God. The people knew what they had earned for themselves. The king described their ways as evil and history records that they were a cruel and violent people but now there is change in heart. And God hears their cry for mercy. **“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.”**

We are a lot like the people of Nineveh. We came into this world as unbelievers – enemies of God and yet God was gracious to us. He called us to faith through the sacrament of Holy Baptism and the working of the Word. Not because we deserve it but because of his grace and compassion. As Luther put it, **“For all this we ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him.”** It is so easy to take our faith for granted. May we be truly sorrowful for our sins as the people of Nineveh were and turn from our sinful ways and the God of all grace will forgive us.

III. The people of Nineveh were committed to change their sinful ways. The angels in heaven rejoiced at their change of heart but Jonah did not. Jonah was displeased and angry. He was mad. Jonah condemned God for his actions. He didn't think these people deserved salvation. In spite of his misplaced anger he prays, but it is not a prayer of love. **“He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”**

Jonah notes God's gracious and compassionate love but wants to limit it. He's mad that God would use him to bring salvation to these people and he says, **“Take away my life.”** God certainly would have every right to do just that but God is patient and asks Jonah, **“Have you any right to be angry?”** No! None at all.

As we think about Jonah and his commitment, what's your commitment to God? Our Gospel lesson gave us the example of Jesus asking different people to follow him and yet some of those he asked, wanted to finish a few other things before following Jesus. They wanted to follow him but on their own terms. We fall into the same trap. Our commitment is only so-so. Some days strong and other days we have better things to do. Thank God his commitment to us is strong. It doesn't waver.

Today may we make a commitment to thank our God for the salvation he has brought us. May we thank him for sending his Son to be our substitute on the cross. May we thank him for bringing us into his family by giving us the gift of faith. May we live our lives for Him! Letting the Word guide us in our lives and like Jonah, sharing God's Word with others.

God gives us plenty of opportunities to thank him and share the good news of salvation. Thank God for those opportunities to serve him by talking about your Savior. It's not hard. The message doesn't have to be long. Maybe John 3:16 or some other Bible passage you know that talks about God's love for us.

As we share God's work and live our faith the Lord will bless the word and draw us closer to him. Helping us to be totally committed as Children of God. Amen.