

Jonah 4

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

James 1:19-21

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Sermon

I knew you would be like that

Jonah does, eventually, go to Nineveh: *after* fleeing from the presence of God, *after* telling the crew that he is a Hebrew; *after* choosing to be thrown into the raging sea, *after* sitting in the belly of the fish for three days and nights and finally...*after* praying.

However, he carries out his mission while carrying in his heart silent aversion. For when Jonah's mission turns out to be successful; that is, when the people of Nineveh repent and God therefore does not do what He said He would do, Jonah is extremely unhappy. He is angry about the outcome of his mission: he is angry because of God's gift of forgiveness to a repenting Nineveh. And from that anger comes a second prayer; a prayer that reveals the full extent of Jonah's anger. Moreover, it unveils the exact reason *why* Jonah was disobedient to God by going the opposite direction of Nineveh,

O Lord,
is not this what I said
when I was yet in my country?
That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish;
for I knew that You are a gracious God
and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,
and relenting from disaster
Therefore now,
O Lord please take my life from **me**,
for it is better for **me** to die than to live (Jonah 4:2,3)

Jonah anticipated what God was going to do because He knew God so well. He knew God's character: gracious, merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. It was Jonah's deep knowledge of God that made him run away from God.

Jonah wants to die, because God forgives the people of Nineveh.

For Jonah God's forgiveness to Nineveh is unbearable.

When Jonah is asked by God if he is right to be angry, Jonah remains silent. Instead of speaking to God, Jonah *does* something without saying a word. He leaves the city, builds a booth and sits under its shade. There Jonah holds on to his anger, while feeling protected by his self-made booth.

What does God do...? How does He respond to what Jonah is doing?

Like Jonah, God too *does* something without saying anything: He adds *His* protection for Jonah by appointing a plant that gives shade. So, Jonah is very pleased.

It is as if God says: ok Jonah, your will be done. Just as He allowed Jonah's will to be done when he was thrown into the sea. That was also something Jonah wanted. But then through the fish, God kept Jonah within His plan. Through His intervention

with the fish, God created a second chance for Jonah to carry out his mission as God had given it to him.

That is what God does when we are stubborn, when we continue to insist on what we want. He deals gently with resistance. At times, God says to us too: ok, I let you have your way. However, like with Jonah, only to a certain extent.

So, how is Jonah doing, under his booth and the plant that God gave him. Still happy, until...

when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4: 7,8)

This is how Jonah breaks his silence. He breaks his silence by expressing his desire to die. So, no change of mind. No change of Jonah's heart. He chose to die rather than go to Nineveh, when he told the men on the ship to throw him into the raging storm. He still wants to die.

All these choices, within God's patience.

This story needs to be recognised for what it is. It is not a historical story. It is fiction written in the form of a caricature of human nature¹. It is a mirror in which readers and hearers can recognise *their* insistence on their own will. The Jonahs who need to learn to choose God's will instead of their own.

That is to be learned in the midst of the storms of our life, the storms of our disagreements with God; the storms of our indignation, the sulking and stubbornness.

The way of God is not unchallenging, for He asks deep questions. He puts His finger on what is sitting deep down within us.

"Do you do well to be angry?"

When God asks Jonah the first time, Jonah says nothing.

Then, after the plant that protected Jonah was attacked by the worm, God asks again.

God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." (Jonah 4:9)

God replies with a question:

"You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that

¹ Verklaring van de Hebreeuwse Bijbel Jona Dr K.A Deurloo.

great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jonah 4:10-11)

An open end that leaves us with God's question to us:

Do you criticise me because I do not your will but my will? Are you angry because I go my way with you? Will you continue to justify your indignation, while I am creating the second opportunity for you to choose to let me save you from your anger and so be defined by my grace?

James says,

let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)

Righteousness can only follow from receiving the implanted word with meekness,:

receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls (James 1:21)

Self-righteousness does not have a place in God's grace.

God's righteousness includes others; creates room for others.

Begrudging... We see what begrudging, jealousy, hatred can do to someone; how it can be fatal to a person as it has been to Jason Arday...a young, talented life.

In Afghanistan, young girls being deprived of education.

A literal translation of the Hebrew word sin is: to miss, to fail or to miss the mark/goal.

Doing that to someone; aiming to make someone miss their goal by trying to weaken and undermine them, that is sin. That sin is committed on all sorts of levels and in all sorts of forms: from micro-aggression; micro-sarcasm; micro-misogynism to bluntly belittling someone.

What goes radically against all that is God's greatest commandment,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Jonah's story shows how our relationship with God is intertwined with the relationship with others. While that is so, God says to each one of us, “My grace is sufficient for you.”