

GOD GIVES US TIME
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JONAH 3:1-5, 10
JAN 25, 2015

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,
² “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the
message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh,
according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly
great city, three days’ journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the
city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and
Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed
God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of
them to the least of them. . . .

¹⁰ 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.

It is important for us to appreciate and not waste
the precious gifts of God’s creation.

Many have realized how true this is of his gift of energy
which we are finding ways of using without wasting it.

This is also true of his various kinds of matter God created
including water and non-renewable resources.

This last week many Christians have reminded our nation
to value & not destroy the precious gift of life God gives.

But today’s readings remind us of a gift God created
which is so easily taken for granted & wasted, gift of time.

Time especially is a gift of grace.

GOD GIVES THE WICKED TIME TO REPENT
GOD GIVES US TIME TO SHARE HIS WORD
GOD GIVES THE TIME JESUS TOOK TO SAVE US

GOD GIVES THE WICKED TIME TO REPENT

Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in
breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And
he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” ⁵
And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and
put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them..

The gracious gift of time God gives Nineveh is 40 days
as he warns then ahead of time the city will be overthrown.

The Bible word for “overthrown” is the same word
used for the sudden destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah
although we don’t know how much preaching
may have been done by Lot without giving time limit.

So 40 days is a generously long grace period,
much longer than it probably took people of Nineveh
to totally destroy cities they attacked.

The brutal and cruel ways the people of Nineveh
tortured and slaughtered their enemies
is almost unmatched in all of history
far surpassing current residents in their neighborhood,
the so-called Islamic State.

But as terrible as it was, this great city was full of people,
people, God tells Jonah later, that he pitied because
they didn’t know their right hand from their left.

They didn’t know right from wrong.
and so original Hebrew of v. 3 says it was
an exceedingly great city ...to God.

Reason God was upset was because he cared about them.

So even Nineveh is given 40 days, Biblical period of time
God uses to prepare and begin something new, like

40 days of rain causing the flood of Noah,
40 years Israel wandered on way to promised land,
40 days Jesus fasted and prayed in wilderness.

which is where we get 40 days of Lent, a time to repent.

We, too need to repent, not to take God’s love for granted.
otherwise, Jesus once warned, on judgment day
the people of Nineveh will rise up to condemn us
who have seen even more of God’s grace than them.

The people of Nineveh didn’t waste any time.

They almost immediately believed God.
apparently not even needing the three days
it would have taken Jonah to walk through it.

The reference to those three days is a hint
that even wicked Nineveh was more ready to repent
than Jonah himself, who had to spend three days
not in sackcloth but inside a fish in order to repent.
of ignoring God’s word to him and wasting the precious time
God had given him to share his word with Nineveh.

GOD GIVES US TIME TO SHARE HIS WORD

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ²“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.

v. 1 mentions the most precious kind of time God gives us:
a second time - God's forgiveness gives us a fresh start.
The familiar story of Jonah is about what happened first time
God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and he ignored God's word
and went the other way with a boatload of unbelievers
who were almost all drowned in a storm
until Jonah confessed that he, who should know better,
was the one who ignored God and made him angry.
Why did he do this? ...because he was lazy? or afraid of them,
or didn't think they would repent anyway?
No, but because he knew God was loving and gracious
and he was afraid they would repent.
Think of a people group you consider nasty and don't like,
maybe even a threat to your country and way of life.
Do you feel like using your gifts, including taking your time
to go tell them what God wants to do for them?
If not, you have something in common with Jonah.
He resisted going to Nineveh because he hated them
and wanted them to die and go to hell forever.
When we do not use the time and other resources God gives us
to share his word with others, it is not just because
we are lazy or don't think it is worth the effort
but because this is what we have in common with Jonah.
This is why Jonah himself needed to repent, and when he did,
God brought him back from death in the belly of the fish
and gave him the gift of more life and a 2nd time.
This is why he went to Nineveh this time.
Not just because he was afraid of what happened first time
but because he saw the amazingly great, undeserved
love and mercy of God for him personally.
In Epistle, Paul says this is reason why he shared the gospel.
Invitation in Gospel reading is to immediately follow
in doing the same
because this is our reason as well.
We use precious time we have to share God's word because

GOD GIVES THE TIME JESUS TOOK TO SAVE US

¹⁰ 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.

v. 4 says that in 40 days Nineveh would be overthrown.

God's word is always true and he always does what he says. But God always preserves a way for him to be merciful.

Hebrew word for overthrown also means turned around.

Nineveh was not overthrown because within 40 days it was turned around in repentance.

so v.10 isn't saying God changed his mind but that he did what he really wanted to do all the time: save them from sin.

This is why Jesus came into the time he created, and spent time of his life on earth with us.

The time of the church year, pictured by the symbols on the posts of the communion rail reminds us of this.

Candles on Advent wreath remind of dark times in O.T. when God's increasing promises kept light of hope alive.

Then, when time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem us.

For 30 years he obeyed God's whole law in our place.

From the time he was revealed by the star to the Wise Men to the time he was revealed & began his public ministry

When the time was fulfilled, he spent 3 years revealing God's grace by his teaching and miracles.

During Lent, we repent of our sins as we remember how when his time had come, he suffered and died on the cross to pay for all of our sins - the real reason for his grace.

Then, as Jonah came alive from 3 days in the belly of the fish, Jesus spent 3 days in the tomb and rose to life again so that we can be forgiven and given new life again.

On the 4th Sunday of the Easter season, our church especially remembers how, as Good Shepherd who lay down his life for the sheep and took it up again, he leads us in the pastures of his word to God's house forever.

At his ascension, he was taken out of sight but continues to watch over us & come to us in Holy Communion.

God's grace continues as the time of the church goes on, Holy Spirit came at Pentecost to fill us with faith in his word & empower us to share greater message than Jonah had

So that we are brought to faith in the one true Triune God
we confess on Trinity Sunday
The long Pentecost season reminds us of how
God continues to give us abundant time on earth to grow
and produce good fruits as branches who have been
grafted into Jesus, the true vine.
And we celebrate that God preserves in our hearts
salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
so that we have peace, joy and the hope of eternal life.
This is why we celebrate with all saints in heaven & follow them
as we look forward to time we will receive crown
of eternal life on the last day.
That day is coming soon, but until that unknown day
God continues to give us precious time.

GOD GIVES THE WICKED TIME TO REPENT
and that includes us who have received his grace.
But in order for this to happen,
GOD GIVES US TIME TO SHARE HIS WORD
but there is no time to waste and no reason to wait because
the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand
GOD GIVES THE TIME JESUS TOOK TO SAVE US
Including the time of his earthly life, his time in the grave
and his rising to live and reign for all eternity
so that we can have not only the time he gives us here
but eternal life with him.