

The struggle of faith: Reflecting on the book of Jonah

February 11, 2018

We're going to be doing something different this morning: We going to be reading and reflecting on the book of Jonah together. Anyone know where the book of Jonah is? It's among the minor prophets at the end of the Old Testament. In your red pew Bibles, you'll find it on pages 752 and 753. It's a short book; easy to miss.

Most of us know the basics of this story: Jonah didn't follow God's instructions and ended up in the belly of a whale. That part of the story that has made it into our popular culture. For that reason, perhaps, along with the gritty humanness that is part and parcel of many Old Testament passages, this story merits a deeper look.

It is a story of struggling with faith. That's something that most of us can identify with. This story helps us think about what that struggle looks like. We see ourselves revealed and we also learn more about the character of God.

So here's how things are going to go: Peggy Owen will be our reader. Peggy will read and then we will share with each other what comes to mind as we think about this. We will do this in four "acts," which are the four chapters. As we do this don't worry about whether or not these things could actually have happened. Instead, take the story at its word. Think about how this story relates to your life as a God-follower. How does this ancient story reflect, or not reflect, your own relationship with God?

Act 1: Jonah runs away from God and ends up in the belly of a big fish

Call, fleeing from the call, making a conscious choice to go the other way, disquiet.

Act 2: Jonah in the belly of the big fish, taking stock.

As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord.

Act 3: Jonah obeys the second call, the people of Nineveh respond and repent.

Act 4: Jonah feels disrespected and hurt.

Self more important than anything else. Link between egotism and suffering.

God's mercy "unfair."

It is important to remember that even if we struggle with what it means to have faith and be faithful, for God this is never a problem. God is faithful. God is merciful and just. And that is true even when those adjectives don't describe us. As we end this time of reflection, listen again to the words from Psalm 62 and hold them in your heart:

:For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶ He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷ On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. ⁸ Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us." Amen.