

**Resisting God Can Buy You a Whale of
Trouble**
2012
3:1-10

Shared January 22, 2012
Based on Jonah

A little girl was talking to her teacher about whales as she became fascinated with whales through the story about Jonah.

The teacher said it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human because even though they were a very large mammal their throat was very small.

The little girl stated Jonah was swallowed by a whale.

The teacher reiterated a whale could not swallow a human; it was impossible.

The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah."

The teacher asked, "What if Jonah goes to the other place?"

The little girl replied, "Then you ask him."

Sometimes the deep things of life call us to stop and go deep within ourselves; the power of the ocean, the vistas of the Grand Canyon, the beauty of our children and grandchildren, the life long mystery of love between two people.

"Three things are too wonderful for me;

four I do not understand:

¹⁹ the way of an eagle in the sky,

the way of a snake on a rock,

the way of a ship on the high seas,

and two people falling in love."

There are the experiences of life that invite us into deep contemplation and connection with mystery. The things I have mentioned so far are gentle invitations to go deep.

However, there are times when life's circumstances throw us into the belly of a whale and we go deep against our will. The belly of the whale represents that uncomfortable place we cocoon as we descend and explore the chaos seasons of our lives.

The losses of our lives can plunge us deep into chaotic waters; the loss of a friend or loved one, the loss of a job, a home, or self esteem. We can find ourselves in the belly of a whale with the loss of a tightly held conviction about life or God. It can throw us for a loop if the world is not what we thought it was.

Another way that we can find ourselves in deep chaotic waters is when we resist what is right. Stubborn resistance to the ways of life and love can throw us into the belly of a whale, and this is the famous prelude to what is happening with our story today.

Jonah resists the call of God which is the same as resisting the tug and movement of life and love in our lives.

Jonah runs from the truth which is impossible because you can no more run from the call of God than you can run from life itself. You can check out, sleep walk, stick your head in the sand, live in denial, escape through addictions to drugs, sex, alcohol, work, and computer games, but you cannot run. We can no better run from life than a fish can run from water. Life will wrap you up and swallow you and bring you the depths of itself until you yield to its call.

In this instance the call was for Jonah to be a vehicle for justice and mercy and he did not want to do it.

This rejection of the Spirit in the life of the prophet and potential good work among the enemies of Israel caused Jonah to go deep and rethink his place in life, and his role in the newest thrust of God in the midst of history.

There is no denying it that all of us have been Jonah at sometime or another for some reason or another. Our stubborn resistance has thrown us into the belly of a whale in chaotic waters.

Who would you not want to succeed? Who would you want to see fail? See defeated? Who would you like to see God smite? Immigrants? Muslims? Liberals? Conservatives?

It is interesting to me that this story was included in the sacred writings of the Hebrew and Christian traditions. It is a story about the most reluctant and stubbornly resistant prophet having the great success. It is a story to remind God's people that God is an inclusive God and is more than our petty human agenda could ever contain.

And Jonah hated it. The rest of the story shows Jonah weeping and wailing, and railing against God, asking him to just end his life because life and love was given to the Ninevites.

What can we draw from this God/human dynamic?

One, God didn't share Jonah's opinion. God doesn't play favorites. And, no matter who the party or person is, God is always willing to extend love, grace and acceptance.

And, two: We don't have to be angels and saints for God to use us. Jonah was bigoted ragged eared, flea bitten, fishy smelling, and hateful person—for some unknown reason—and despite even that, God was able to use him.

The book of Jonah brings me much comfort. Because I can be every bit a jerk as he was. And, even with that against me, God can still use me to do great things. God's things.