

Problem: What does transformation mean for us? What does transformation mean for God?

-“Forty days more, and Our Savior’s Lutheran Church of Bonner shall be overthrown!” Wasn’t that a great sermon? Do you feel moved yet? No! Of course, it’s pretty silly. Welcome back to our continuation with the story of the prophet Jonah. Our third week installment follows our fearless prophet, Jonah son of Amittai (son of “faithfulness”) freshly out of the fish’s belly and now into the gigantic city of Nineveh, a city that not only is completely foreign but a mortal enemy at that. It would be like you and I walking into ISIS controlled Mosul, Iraq to preach a sermon. This is probably why Jonah’s prophetic message or sermon is by any standard the shortest in the entire Bible: just 5 words. Imagine what the response would be if your pastor preached 5 word sermons every week. I shudder at the thought!

-Of course the comedic nature of Jonah’s tale continues as well. The joke yet again is on Jonah: after waltzing in, preaching a pitiful 5 word sermon, and then getting the heck out what’s the response? It’s immense! Even the King of Nineveh strives for not being outdone in his commitment to the God of Israel. So what is the storyteller trying to say about God and how God works within this humorous episode?

-Believe it or not, this little sermon that Jonah preaches does have a deeper nugget of wisdom that might be missed by our translation. “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” The Hebrew word “overthrown” is the same word that is used in the Sodom and Gomorrah story within the book of Genesis and it can correctly be translated as “overthrown.” But Jonah uses the word in a passive voice which has a different primary meaning. A more accurate translation of the passive voice meaning is “to turn around” or “to be transformed.” Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be transformed. Certainly, beyond the humorous interchange between Jonah and the city of Nineveh, there is a turning or transformation that is going on here. Nineveh is transformed. But there is another transformation going on here too: “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed God’s mind about the calamity that God had said the divine would bring upon them; and God did not do it.” There is a turning of God too.

-Thus, transformation is very important in this story and brings up an important question: what does the example of transformation here mean for us? What does it mean for God to be transformed?

Solution: “Turning” or “transformation” means responding and participating to a creation constantly turning.

-People are very angry at our political system which has been brought to light by this upcoming election. We have heard over the many months and years critiques of how “Washington D.C. doesn’t understand us” or “our lawmakers are serving their own interests and not the interests of the people.” Many of these critiques can be boiled

down to an observation that the America on the ground is continually changing and the America in Washington D.C. is static and unable to respond.

-The Book of Jonah, I believe, is asking an important question which relates to these critiques of our political system: Is the God of Israel a God who is “up above” and “static” or a God who is “on the ground”? Our storytellers answer to this question definitely seems to be the later. Despite Jonah’s protests and temper-tantrums. Despite the evil and abusive takeover of Israel/Palestine by Babylon (whose capital city is Nineveh). Despite Jonah’s ridiculous 5 word sermon, God adapts and is a God who is committed to being “on the ground”. When you are on the ground, you gotta turn.

-Because, ironically, God created this creation to infact “turn around”. The Earth sits on it’s axis and turns around every moment.

-So in other words, we were created by God to, infact, be creatures of “turning around” and “transformation”. Martin Luther and the reformers constantly talked about our God given task in life is to live out as fully as we can our humanness, or the form in which we were given. Birds are meant to live out their “birdness” as best as they can. Flowers are meant to live out their “flowerness” as best as they can. We are all called to live out as best as we can our full potential, our full “creatureness” which God gave us.

- In order to do this, to live out our full potential as God created us to be, I would argue and I believe the Book of Jonah would argue that we need to live out transformation. Being fully human means “being turned around”, being transformed. Being fully God also means being turned and transformed.

-Now, other brothers and sisters of faith would maybe say God is unchanging, God’s principles and morales remain steadfast and a compass for creation. I also think this is true.

-This text is not a postmodern text and any attempt to solely put it alongside a postmodern deconstruction of God and principle is not honest. This story does not support a postmodern God which is “all change all the time.” What this story is instead trying to paint a picture of, I believe, is a God who puts down axis points that are surrounded by turning. God is love, but that love is continually transforming. God is relationship, but that relationship can take different forms and meaning. God is hope, but that hope can take different forms and meaning across time.

-God creates a world that actually “turns”. In order to participate in this world fully on the ground, God (and us) have to turn with it.

-Jesus Christ, ultimately then, can be seen as a fully living out of the story of Jonah: of changing God’s mind, of God’s on-the-ground-response to a turning world.

Implication: We are created to be transformed.

-Today we are having a congregational meeting. A meeting to discuss a bunch of things: from painting the church to an update on renting our Church Home. Many of these things have come to pass very recently and didn’t even exist when we had our

usual annual meeting in January. What a cool example of God's world turning and transforming! What a great time it is to celebrate and give thanks for how God is turning in and outside of this church in ways we can only begin to understand.

-It's easy to forget that God and us can be turned even in a congregational meeting. Even in a small conversation or a handshake. God and us can be turned even in a piddly 5 word sermon.

-Let us have the courage to live out our humanness, with God's grace, as best as we can and in doing so live out transformation today, tomorrow, and beyond. Amen.