21-27 January How we respond to God’s call

Jonah 3: 1-5, 10

Jonah Goes to Nineveh

3 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. 4 Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

**Bible notes**

A lot has happened in Jonah’s life when God calls him a second time to go into Nineveh. The focus of this part of the story is on the grace and mercy of God: when people respond positively to God’s call to repent, God quickly forgives. In fact, what the text suggests is that when the Ninevites repent, so does God; God has a change of heart and mind, and stops threatening to bring calamity on the city.

The story is told without fanfare. Jonah goes partway into the city, begins to share his message, the people hear it and change their ways, so God relents from threatening to bring calamity. End of story! Except we know what preceded these verses (Jonah and the ‘whale’) and what comes after it in chapter 4 (Jonah and the plant). In particular, we know that Jonah is a reluctant prophet. He didn’t want to go because he knew this is what God would do and he was afraid that he’d look a fool. I wonder how often we shy away from telling people about God because we are similarly afraid of the reaction and how we’ll look.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Who is our good news for? Jonah tells us it’s for everyone. God loves Nineveh – so, what about the neighbourhood our church is in? The message was good news for all of Nineveh’s citizens, from the poor in outlining shanty towns (v.4) to the yuppies and aristocrats (v.6) – God loved them all. Do we limit the gospel to people like us? What we learn about people from this story is that they are open to the possibility of good news. The people of Nineveh gave Jonah a hearing and responded positively – who’s to say our neighbours won’t respond in the same way?

Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* Why might this young man have stopped like this?
* The end of a long journey, a special moment – how do you describe your response to God’s call?
* Is there something you feel you should be doing, but are not?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

**A prayer of praise**

Response after each phrase:
**and we will praise you, now and always.**

God of now and always,
you are our refuge and our shelter:
To you we can bring our concerns and our joy:
With your Spirit we can overcome fear and respond to your call with courage:
With you by our side we can be more than we ever thought we could be:

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Lord, some things you ask us to do are right up our street.
Some are more tricky.
Some can be downright difficult.
Help us grow in love for you,
and in confidence and trust,
so that we really want to do them for you – and do!
**Amen.**