



Sermon, Sunday January 12, 2025 "The Lord's Compassion and Mercy"

SCRIPTURE: Jonah 3:1-5 & 3:10 ¹The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²"Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

Introduction: Prophet Jonah's calling

Today's text is the story of Jonah, which most Christians are familiar with. The Lord tells Jonah to preach the gospel to Nineveh, a prosperous Assyrian city located on the banks of the Tigris River. However, Jonah does not follow the Lord's command and runs away to Tarshish, today's Spain. On the way to Tarshish, when the ship is in a situation where everyone could die due to a storm, he feels remorse, confesses that it was because of him that they encountered the storm, and falls into the sea.

The Lord prepares a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah prays in the fish's stomach for three days and nights, repented, was vomited out of the fish by the grace of the Lord, and went to Nineveh. Jonah proclaims the word of the Lord in Nineveh.

However, there was no sincerity in the message Jonah proclaimed in Nineveh. Jonah cried out, '**Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!**' but Jonah did not say what the people of Nineveh should repent of or that the Lord would save them if they repented. Jonah preached the word of the Lord in Nineveh, but he did not want the people of Nineveh to repent and be saved.

This is because Jonah could not understand the Lord's will to 'proclaim the word of repentance' to the Gentiles who were persecuting and hostile to the Jews. In the Book of Jonah, there are passages that help us understand Jonah's heart. Jonah 4:3 says, '**And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.**' Also, Jonah 4:8 says, '**It is better for me to die than to live.**' These verses show Jonah's heart that only the Jews chosen by the Lord should be saved rather than the Lord's will to show mercy to the Gentiles.

Body: Jonah's Anger at the Lord's Compassion

Jonah should rejoice if the people of Nineveh repent, and disaster will not befall them. But Jonah hated this and got angry. (Jonah 4:1) The Lord tried to persuade Jonah not to be angry with him, but he did not give up his opinion. (Jonah chapter 4). Why was Jonah so stubborn towards the Lord?

The Jews of Jonah's time thought that the Lord gave grace and salvation only to the Jews. They thought that all Gentiles should be judged. Therefore, Jonah could not accept the salvation of the people of Nineveh, the Gentiles who were persecuting them.



To Jonah, the Lord says: **‘And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?’**(Jonah 4:11). These words clearly show us what the Lord's heart is toward the creatures He created. Even though the Jews rejected the Gentiles, the Lord wanted to save them.

Some people have been interested in understanding the story of Jonah because the people of Nineveh came to salvation through repentance. However, the most important theme of the Book of Jonah is the compassion of the Lord who changes His will to save creation.

In fact, to the ancient Jews it was inconceivable that the Almighty Lord would change His will once He had decided. However, the Lord's compassion toward creation makes this possible. The Lord's heart toward these creatures is His desire to embrace and save people with different religions, beliefs, and values than us.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

The salvation that the Lord has given us by grace is given to us only according to the Lord's will. Salvation is not something we can obtain through our efforts. However, Christians must strive to help all creatures in the world receive salvation by imitating the Lord's compassionate heart.

So, what efforts can a Christian make toward this end? First, efforts are needed at the social level. Among sociological terms, there is a word called **'Othering'**.

'Othering' refers to the process of separating a specific individual or group as different from oneself and denying their unique identity. This **'Othering'** mainly occurs from discriminatory perspectives such as race, gender, and class, and becomes the basis for social exclusion or prejudice.

For example, let's assume that school education is conducted in a way that excludes students who are poor at studying or who cause problems. Students who experience **'Othering'** through this educational method end up **'Othering'** other objects again according to their experience.

This is the same as Jonah in today's text who thinks, **‘Gentiles cannot be saved, I cannot accept such a thing happening, it is better to die than to accept it.’** The church must work to prevent these things from happening in our society.

It also requires effort on a personal level. In today's text, Jonah placed his thought that Gentiles should not be saved ahead of the Lord's merciful heart. This is the same as the inability of many modern people to give up the achievement of wealth, fame, and power as their criteria for success.

Everyone in this world has their own unique depth and scent of life. We don't all have to follow the idea that success is only achieved through money, fame, and power. Therefore, even if we have less money than others, have many health problems than others, and are less educated than others, we should not forget that each of these lives has its own unique depth. If we miss out on the depth and diversity of life and become obsessed with worrying about what we will do if we do not meet the world's standards of success, our lives will fall apart.

Conclusion: The path to universal salvation

Because the Lord changes His will for us, He shines the light of salvation even in situations we least expect. So, no matter how dark our lives seem, the light of salvation always comes.

To experience this light in the darkness, what we absolutely need is to realize and experience the Lord's compassion and mercy toward us. This is the core of the message the Book of Jonah tried to convey to us.

Now, we are in the season of Epiphany. We experienced light in the darkness through Jesus Christ. Those who truly believe in Jesus Christ will experience the light of life through the Lord's holy compassion and mercy. May the Lord's blessings be upon us all. **Amen!**

