

Sunday Sermon October 22, 2017

Sermon Text: Jonah 4: 5-11

Sermon Theme: God is attached to us.

⁵ *Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.* ⁶ *Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.* ⁷ *But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.* ⁸ *When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."*

⁹ *But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?"*

"I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."

¹⁰ *But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight."* ¹¹ *But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"*

This is the time of the year when all of the Peanuts cartoons are replayed on TV. Starting with Halloween there's *It's the Great Pumpkin Charlie Brown*, then a *Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*, and finally a *Charlie Brown Christmas*. Many of us have seen or read Peanuts either as a comic strip or in the animated movies. We might be acquainted with some of the main characters. There's Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Peppermint Patty, Sally, Lucy, and Linus.

Each of them have their own little quirks which make them interesting and funny. Linus' quirk is right there for everyone to see: his blanket. Linus does not do anything without his blanket. He sleeps with it, he eats with it, he goes to school with it, he even sits in the pumpkin patch with it. He and his blanket are inseparable. He is attached to that blanket and will not let it go.

Maybe there's something that you are attached to: a family heirloom, a memento, a piece of jewelry, or something from your childhood like a blanket or stuffed animal. When there is an attachment to something you know how hard it can be, maybe even impossible, to let it go. You take extra care because you care about it so much. Maybe you even take it with you wherever you go like Linus did with his blanket.

In our sermon text this morning, God teaches Jonah that is he intimately attached to people. He teaches Jonah that that attachment comes from his love. God shows his attachment and love for people in many ways. He has created us, provides for us, calls to us, and saves us.

The book of Jonah is a short book with an abrupt ending. The verses of our sermon text are the last words on the book. In the book of Jonah, God teaches a lesson using the contrast between Jonah's unhappiness and unwillingness to preach forgiveness to the Assyrians and God's grace and mercy in wanting to forgive the Assyrians.

Jonah was a prophet of Israel during the reign of King Jereboam II. King Jereboam had had great success in returning the borders of the country to their former glory. It was a time of peace and prosperity in Israel, but it was not a time that was free of trouble.

There were two kinds of trouble that Israel faced; one was inward one was outward. The inward trouble that Israel faced was from their own complacency between God and his Word. Whenever God blessed the nation with peace and prosperity, the people would begin to turn from the Lord and begin to trust in themselves. They would begin to live their lives in ways that glorified their money, possessions, luxuries, and their sinful desires.

The other danger was from the outside. One of the reasons that Israel had been able to reestablish their northern borders was because Assyria was growing in power in the north. As the Assyrians warred against their neighbors, Israel was able to take back the lands that were historically theirs. But they knew sooner or later Assyria might come for them.

For Jonah, these were not two problems but one. God had spoken through two other prophets, Amos and Hosea. His message was clear. Because of the wickedness and unbelief of Israel, Israel would not be

spared of his judgment on sin. They would be attacked, defeated and carried off by the Assyrians because of their unbelief.

You can imagine the sadness that this must have brought to all of God's prophets. It must have been very difficult for them to be proclaiming God's message and then have no one listen to them.

Then God gives Jonah a new mission. Go to the city of Ninevah, the capital of the Assyrian empire, and preach to them to repent of their sins and turn to him.

Jonah responds in a very sinful human way. He loves his own people, but he does not love the nation that is coming to conquer them. Why would he ever want to go to those people and call out to them to repent? He did not want to see them succeed in defeating his people and his nation.

Jonah runs from his new mission. He boards a ship heading in the opposite direction from Assyria. It is during this journey that a furious storm arises. Jonah realizes it is God calling to him. Jonah requests to be thrown overboard and God provides the great fish to swallow him up and there Jonah lived for three days.

Finally, after three days in the belly of the fish, Jonah is deposited onto the shore and then he goes to Ninevah to preach.

Jonah finally preaches in the city and an amazing thing happens. Unlike his own people, these unbelieving Assyrian hear his message and believe. Their king even issues an edict that they should fast in order to repent of their sin. And God forgives them and doesn't destroy them.

This brings us to our sermon text for this morning. After preaching to the people, Jonah goes outside the city to see what the Lord will do.

Maybe Jonah thought that the Assyrians might not repent and then God would have to destroy them before they ever marched towards Israel. But God's forgiveness destroyed that hope. God's forgiveness was a sign that God was going to carry through on his promise to destroy Israel. To a Jew like Jonah, that would be the very definition of unfair. God was being kinder and more loving to a Gentile nation than his own people. It did not seem like God was being faithful to the promise he had made to Israel. Jonah begins to sulk in his anger against the Lord.

God gives Jonah a living lesson with the vine. He makes the vine grow up, giving Jonah some relief from the hot sun. Jonah becomes attached to the vine. He liked the shade the vine provided as he sat and sulked. But then the Lord allowed that worm to chew the vine and it withered and died and Jonah had no relief all over again. He cared more about the vine than the souls of the people he had just preached to. He was so angry he wanted to die.

God asks him a very simple question, **"Do you have any reason to be angry about the vine?"** Then God gives him an important lesson, **"You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"**

Jonah you became so attached to this vine even though you did nothing for it, you did nothing to it and it was here only for a short time. You cared about something, you became attached to something so quickly. How much more should I show love and care for people whom I have been attached to for so long.

God is attached to each of us more closely and intimately than Linus is with his blanket or Jonah was to this vine. God never wants to lose us, he never wants to be separate from us.

He has shown this love and attachment in many different ways. He created us as the crown of his creation. He made us with many gifts and abilities that make us individuals. He didn't do this by accident. He did this on purpose so that we could use these abilities to serve his purpose in the world.

He provides for us every day, giving us exactly what we need to accomplish his purpose and his plan for this day, then the next, then the next. He also protects us from dangers; some we see and other we don't even know about.

He loves us so much that even when we sin, he does not abandon us, he calls out to us with his truth.

Most of all God shows us his love by the way he puts that love into action through Jesus. God sent Jesus so that we would not only have an example of his love, but that he might bring his love to us personally and intimately and that that love would lead to an eternity in heaven. Through Jesus, God has brought us to himself and made us his children. He has washed away our sin and creates and strengthens faith inside of us.

He gives us the promise of heaven that someday we will take hold of through him. God tells us in his Word that he is so attached to us that nothing can separate us from his love and caring.

God's message to Jonah is simple. You loved and became attached to something that you had nothing to do with, shouldn't I love and care for something that I have created, preserved, and saved.

Our God shows that he loves us and is attached to us, but what are we attached to? Like Paul says, are we attached to our God in faith like vines and branches or are we attached to other things? Are we attached more strongly to our family, our friends, or our earthly life?

The danger of being attached too strongly to things in this world is that we can easily begin to focus on them like the Israelites had done. Then, when things don't go our way, we lose those things, or life becomes difficult, we act like Jonah. Our sinful nature thinks it knows better than what God does. Just like Jonah we want God to do it our way and if he doesn't, we want to walk in our own way and not in his.

God showed great love to his own people in Israel by calling them to repent, he showed great love to a city of Gentile unbelievers, and he shows great love to us. He calls out to us in our sinfulness, that we would repent and know the forgiveness that he brings.

God teaches Jonah that he is attached to his people on earth. He loves them and wants them to be saved. We are more important to God than a blanket or a vine or anything else. He loves us so much that he has given us a Savior so that we would be his forever. Amen.