

I realize that we have just finished Christmas, but I am going to say that “L” word anyway: **Lent**. There, I wrote it. I feel better now, like a huge weight off my chest (sorry, that sounds like I am laying it on thick). Anyway, Lent is coming soon with Ash Wednesday on March 2. *Why in the world is this guy talking about Lent in January?* Well, the reason I am mentioning Lent is that I am excitedly working on my midweek preaching series through the book of Jonah. *You mean the guy who got swallowed by a whale?* Actually, the Bible says a “big fish”, but that is just splitting hairs, back to my point.

I have always liked Jonah because he is more like us than we sometimes care to admit. He is a prophet; someone who claims that he fears God (at least that is what he told the sailors on that stormy sea). But yet, Jonah repents (runs away) from God when God commanded him to preach a message to a people that he (Jonah) did not like. Most God-fearing people repent from sin, not God. But admit it, you have run away from God’s call more that you care to admit. You do not have to answer that right now – back to Jonah. Jonah finally goes to “those people” after being vomited up on a beach following a three-day stint in the belly of a big fish. Jonah preaches the message of judgment but is fearful that God will be merciful if “those people” repent. “Those people” do repent and God is merciful, and Jonah is angry. “SMITE THEM, O GOD. THEY DO NOT DESERVE MERCY.” And the story continues, but I will save the rest for Lent.

Sorry to leave you hanging, but my point here is not to advertise Lent (which I am kind of doing) but rather to draw your attention to an important truth: Living in the belly of a fish is smelly and miserable. *Well duh, I don’t need a pastor to tell me that.* Actually, you kind of do, because if you are running away from God, life does not smell like roses, despite what you may say. Life is miserable and stinky because running away from God never turns out well for the runner, just ask Jonah.

And so, instead of running away from God, run to God – not stopping to smell the roses but smelling them along the way. This does not mean life will be easy. This does not mean that you will always enjoy everything God commands you. What this means is that you will be part of God’s perfect and sovereign plan – a beautiful painting yet to be revealed, even if you do not understand it. But when you see that painting someday, through Jesus Christ, it will all make sense and thus God will be glorified. Do not try to create your own painting; your own

story but be part of God's story; God's painting. Get out of that fish's belly you are in and trust God. I promise you; you will not be disappointed. Amen.