

2009, 1-25 Live for second chances, Jonah 3:1-5 (Epiphany 3)

Jonah, Jonah, Jonah. Why couldn't you have just followed the Lord the first time?! Like other prophets he was reluctant to go where God wanted him to go and do what God wanted him to do. The first time he disobeyed God. He was tossed over the boat, swallowed by a whale, spit on to the land. He tried to avoid God so much, but now God gives him a second chance.

Boy, am I glad to get second chances. This last week I put the garbage out a day late, missed my dentist appointment, and my computer broke down so couldn't write my sermon. Thankfully, I have a second chance to do all those things.

You know sometimes you get more than a second chance. You get a third, fourth or even a hundredth chance. God has given me 10 chances this hunting season. Ten arrows left my bow this year, and I have zero deer to show for it. You know how it is, you just want to kick yourself every time you miss a chance. But then there is always one more chance for you.

That is the way God sees it anyway. Think about with Peter who denied Jesus three times. Jesus certainly gave him more chances. Think about Saul who's name was changed to Paul. He persecuted Christians then God gave him a chance to be a Christian himself. And then there is Jonah, after the whale incident, "Then the word of the Lord came to him a second time"

Someone else in that same story had a second chance, the Ninevites. They were a horrible, corrupt, violent people. And God is planning on destroying them for the things they have done. But they somehow knew that God might be merciful. He might give them a second chance. And so they repent of their sins, they put on sackcloth, and the

declare a fast. When God saw that, he gave them a second chance. He gave them a chance to start over again, to do a better job, to fulfill the calling he had for them.

God allows for us to be reborn. In baptism today, Carson was given a second birth. This birth into God's family forgives his sins and gives him many chances to follow God. God continues in our lives to recycle that water of baptism. He brings it back when we look to him for forgiveness. He washes us clean once again.

Sadly, sometimes we look back at the scars. We look back at the things that we broke and cannot be fixed again. And we think about the things we did that cannot be undone.

But that is the miracle of Jesus. He can undo them. He did and does undo them. Through his death on the cross he took the hit for these sins. And through his resurrection he brings to life all who were dead.

He forgives us and gives us an opportunity to live again. He gives us an opportunity to tell others "Don't make the same mistake as I did." He gives us the forgiveness to know that we can bring life to others people's lives just as God has brought life to ours.

Once again guilt might creep back in to our thinking. We might think our sin is too heavy for God to forgive. But if anyone understands the quantity of sin, God does. Think of all those people he forgave in Ninevah. He forgave an entire nation of murderers, abusers, and rapists. Don't you think he can forgive one person's sins after he has placed the sins of entire nations, from all of history, and nailed them all right to himself on the cross.

Just because we missed a lot of chances doesn't mean we can't be a success. Think about Baseball. Do you realize that the best hitter in the game only succeed about a third of the time? Seven out of ten at bats end up in failure. Hmm.. that would make them big time failures from another point of view. But know one thinks that way. People see there successes when they watch Baseball and that makes all the difference.

It was baseball's opening day in 1954. The Milwaukee Braves and the Cincinnati Reds played each other, and a rookie for each team made his major-league debut during that game. The rookie who played for the Reds hit four doubles and helped his team win the a score of 9-8. The rookie for the Braves went 0 for 5, which means he had no hits at all. The Reds player was Jim Greengrass, a name you probably have never heard. The other guy, who did not get a hit, you might be more familiar with, his name was Hank Aaron. He had a few more chances to hit home runs, and he became one of the best home run hitters in the history of the game.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he was giving them a second chance. They had been caught up in so many sexual sins. They had so many problems with quarrels, and division, and list of issues goes on and on. Paul took the time to go through specifically how to handle all these circumstances. He guided them each step of the way so that they could overcome these problems and stop making the same mistakes again and again. He was very patient giving them second chances.

A fellow is standing at a bar, just looking at his drink. For a solid half-hour, he just stares at it. Suddenly , a big trouble-making truck driver steps up next to him, takes the drink and chugs it down. The poor man starts crying.

The truck driver says, “Come on, man, I was just joking. Here, I’ll buy you another drink. I can’t stand to see a man cry.”

“You don’t understand,” says the first fellow. “This day is the worst day of my life. First, I slept through the alarm this morning and got into the office late. My boss fired me on the spot.

I left the building to go to the car and found, that in just the few minutes I had been inside, it had been stolen. The police were no help; they said I was probably out of luck. No kidding.

“Luck? I got a cab to return home, and when I left it, I realized that I had left my wallet and all my credit cards on the back seat. I tried to get the cabs attention as he drove away, but no, off he went.”

“I got inside the house, much earlier than anyone expected. Surprise honey, I’m home. I found my wife in bed with the gardener.

“I left home and came to this bar. I stood here seriously thinking about ending it all. I was almost ready to do it. Then you showed up and drank my poison.”

The trucker unknowingly saved this poor man’s life. He died and gave the sad man a second chance. Jesus knowingly and intentionally died to give you a second chance. He gave you a new life. A life to start over again.

God never wants to give up on us. He keeps calling us back. You know the disciples that followed Jesus didn’t just meet Jesus. Simon Peter, Andrew, and James had likely met Jesus before. But now was their chance. Now was there chance to follow him. Today was the day.

Today was the day to turn their life around. Today was the day to embrace the healing and forgiveness of Jesus. And today is the day that you have a second chance.

Amen.