



Well, it has certainly been an exciting last five months in the Kramme house. Last June my wife and I welcomed our second boy into our family and as-if I couldn't fall more in love with being a dad, I have. One of my hobbies now is sitting with my wife and thinking about how they are going to turn out; if they'll be more like me or their mom, or a blend of both, which one will get arrested first. My money is on the older one. It's either heartwarming or really lame to be honest. But aren't we all that way about our kids and the people we love? We pay more attention than most. We've got special, rose-colored lenses that we see them through, and really it is only when someone disagrees that you really realize how you see them. That happened to me not too long ago. Someone had the audacity to see my older boy differently than me.

This was back in July and I picked him up from Kids' Club at the fitness place we're members at and I noticed that he was looking pretty down. I asked him what the problem was and he said those words you never want to hear as a parent, "the kids at kids club don't like me and they don't want to play with me."

All at once, I had that feeling that every parent has once in their life: I'm going to have to beat up some five year olds. It's the only way to make this right. No, I'm just kidding, while I was upset about it, what I was most upset about was the idea that someone or a group of people could possibly not see what I see when I look at my boy. I know they say that not getting sleep and all that is the hardest part about being a parent, but goodness, this feeling that my little boy who I love with all of my heart could be rejected by someone else, that sure comes close.

Have you been there?

Maybe not with your child, but with someone you love or care deeply about. For example, you see what is right in your parents when others don't, you see what is good and beautiful in your friend, but there are other people who can

only see what is wrong. Or hey, you look in the mirror every day and you don't see you in a way that is valuable. And it is both confusing and heartbreaking that due to a difference in perspective, these people in your life would be discounted.

I think that God has had that feeling and I think that God has that feeling often. With his kids. With us.

And today I want to talk about one specific situation where that happened. It is a familiar story about one of God's messengers or prophets, Jonah. And what I want to do by the end of my time is challenge you all, us, Prince of Peace in the way that God challenged Jonah at the end of his story, to see people the way that God does: first as God's children, and then as brothers and sisters.

Jonah, if you met him on the street, is probably like one of those bands that had one song that they got famous for that they really didn't even think was their best work. Most of the time when we think about Jonah, we think what? Whale, giant fish. But, when we do that we discount the fact that prior to that whole story, Jonah had a life that had somehow led him to become a prophet of Israel. In other words, he was a faithful follower of God.

What's that mean?

He was a "go-er."

From the beginning, the story of humanity has been a story of "going." In the garden, God told Adam and Eve to "go and work the land." When God gave Abraham and his wife a child, God told them to "go and be a blessing, creating a nation of go-ers." God tells Isaac, "go," tells Jacob, "go," tells Joseph "go," When God rescued Israel from Egypt, God told them to "go."

In other words, to be a faithful follower of God, you needed to be a go-er to the places and purposes God called you to bring blessing to. Well, as a prophet, Jonah must have been that. Until our reading for today.

God tells Jonah to go again, this time to the city of Nineveh to preach a message of repentance to the people there. What's his response? Nope! Jonah sees that he would have to go to Nineveh. A people he sees as enemies, as outsiders, and worthy of destruction and immediately turns tail, charts a boat, and flees from God instead of going to Nineveh.

Of course, we know the way that God short cuts Jonah's plans, God causes a storm, the other sailors throw him off the boat to save themselves and God provides a fish to save him from drowning. And in the midst of his fishy situation, Jonah seems to change his mind about things. And so God has the fish spit him out in the direction of Nineveh.

When he reaches the city Jonah begins to share the message God had given him. And what is really amazing is the way that the people respond: It was instantaneously accepted. It went straight to their hearts from the least to the greatest. Even the king took off his royal robes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He sent out a decree to the city that everyone should do the same. Even the livestock were to put on sackcloth and ashes. In other words, what happened was exactly what Jonah feared: God would show compassion for a people he didn't like.

After he leaves Nineveh, we find him on top of a hill overlooking the city, angry. Angry that the Ninevites repented and followed God. Angry because he knew that God saw the Ninevites differently. That God would see them as his children worthy of a second chance, of new life, of a future.

So God calls him on it, "is it right for you to be angry, Jonah?" God says.

God leaves him there, to think about it, and God even provides some shelter for Jonah with a plant. The next day, God causes the plant to die and poses the question again, "Jonah, is it right for you to be angry?" and Jonah, says, "yes. And I wish I were dead."

And that is the moment I think that our experience and God's experience sort of line up. God, the father of all of us, sees his children have new life and yet Jonah sees things differently. Jonah sees an enemy getting off the hook when he should see brothers and sisters embracing the family. Jonah needs to get his perspective checked. And quite often, so do we.

We, the church, prince of peace, each of us, are the descendants and the future of this going people. God didn't stop saying "go" in the Old Testament. Jesus said "go" to his disciples. Paul told the church to "go to the ends of the earth" But there are so many times, and maybe more often than not, that we find ourselves like Jonah, called to go and love our brothers and sisters, but then we turn on our TV, scroll through our Facebook, and we see anything but a family resemblance. Instead we see red people, blue people, black people, enemies, people who have it coming—Ninevites--and we say "nope!" to God, charter a boat and get out of dodge.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, maybe you have noticed that God hasn't been reorienting people with fish in the last couple of years. . By and large, if we don't want to go, we don't. And this is the cost: The aliveness, the hope, the heart bursting, life making, earth shattering relationship we have with our Father God stays a secret to those that need it most. "Oh it's good medicine" we say, "but for only the people we like."

No. We're a going people and we can't let that happen. The love of our father in heaven isn't just ours to claim. So what is there to do? We have to work to change the way we see. How do you do that?

I don't think it is too much different than if you were near sighted like me: Get a corrective lens to look through while things are still blurry. Read the Gospels and see people through Jesus' eyes. What might that be like?

Here is what it isn't: Jonah, you, me, most people subscribe to the WYSIWYG philosophy of assessing people. Or "what you see is what you get." For Jonah, when he saw the Ninevites, he saw people who had it coming. People who had chosen not to follow God and so deserving of whatever punishment or problems came their way. It's looking at people basically as they are, as the sum of their failures, and what bothers you about them.

In the gospels the Pharisees did the same thing: When they saw Zacchaeus they saw a tax collector, when the paralyzed man was lowered through the roof they saw a sinner getting in the way of trap, when they saw the woman at the well, they saw a pariah, when they saw the thief on the cross, they saw a sinner getting his just rewards.

But, when Jesus sees these them. Jesus sees a brother who was far away but has come home. A brother who had no options now have a future. A sister pushed to the margins, pulled to the heart of the community. A brother in the deepest brokenness, welcomed into paradise.

The gospels say that Jesus came as a "sign of Jonah" to a generation. He understood his role to be that of a corrective lens for religious people. That was true then, and that it true now. Your life is full of people you see as Ninevites. Your Facebook and your conversations with people this week ahead of the election will tempt you forget everything I have just said. Am I right? In just a few weeks the holiday season will begin and every busted up family dynamic you can ignore while it's warm out will tempt you to forget everything I just said.

We know that will happen.

So, I want you to try something for the next 21 days. When you are going about your life and open your computer, when you have a disagreement, when you have a fight. I want you to put your hands over your eyes, just like this. Hold them there until the floaty things stop moving. Then release them and say this, "God help me see _____ as my brother/Sister." Remind yourself to see like Jesus. Train yourself to have the heart for others that God has for you—his child. I promise that when you do that, you'll start to see differently and your world will change. It will change because the family of God will start to act like it and the ninevites in your life will become children of God and brothers and sisters.