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What does this poetic, satirical story reveal about our hearts, relationships, rhetoric, and world view? Can it help us re-examine our categories, labels and boundaries? How does this story connect to your story?

THE STORY OF
Jonah



WEEK 3 / JONAH 2

Storms and Fish

SYNOPSIS

Jonah is swallowed by a big fish. Inside the fish, neither dead nor really alive, Jonah prays a long, eloquent prayer of gratitude from the psalms. Then the fish vomits Jonah up on dry land.

FROM THIS WEEK'S RECORDING:

All of a sudden your awareness of good events and bad events starts to wobble a bit. ...

What the narrator of Jonah does is take these simplistic categories and just beats them to a pulp. There is a wisdom that is not trapped in dualities that say "this is how the world works." There is a whole other realm of wisdom that understands that the world doesn't work the way that it's supposed to, and labels don't work, that is not trapped in dualities, a wisdom that transcends and embraces all of it. ...

It's an awareness that whatever it is, however it comes to us, however it's labeled, God can work even in the midst of even that. ... This is not the dominant way that our culture speaks, but it is the wisdom you find in the scriptures over and over again. It's like the narrator of Jonah says, "I'm going to shred to pieces your conventional ways of ordering the world. And when your boxes and labels are smashed, and your world view is just obliterated, when you get to that point, then you will have wisdom. But it will be wisdom that's be able to wrap its arms around the complexities of life instead of clinging to the same old simplistic dualities that don't serve anyone well."

— Rob Bell

Do improbable tales like this one make Christianity hard to swallow? Is your first impulse to find a rational explanation for this story, or dismiss it entirely? What do you miss when you approach stories that way? Is the world more mysterious than you'd like to admit? Can God work in mysterious ways?

Or do you think this story happened exactly as it's written, big fish and all? What do you miss when you approach stories that way? Could you get so wrapped up in the literal plot that you miss how this story engages, invites, and transforms you now? Could you miss your role in this story? Can God reveal powerful truths through satire and parable?

What do the storms and the fish reveal about Jonah? Have you encountered storms and fish in your life? What do they reveal about you? Have your storms and fish changed the value of anything in your life? Do they change what you care about? What has this storm dragged to the surface?

Is Jonah's prayer about lament or thanksgiving? Why do we assume Jonah needs or wants to be rescued from the storms and fish? Is there any reason to give thanks for the storms and fish? Can Jonah's hardships help, even rescue him? How?

Can your hardships rescue you? From what? Does that make your hardships a good thing? Does God send you struggle? Is this a God of tough love, who wants us to suffer? Is God punishing Jonah here?

Are the answers that black and white? What does it mean to be trapped in a duality? Are our experiences only good or only bad? What changes when you let go of those categories and infuse your life with God's restoration and hope?

Was God present in Jonah's storms and fish? Is God present in your storms and fish? Does that change the way you experience storms and fish? How?