

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?

WEEK 4 / JONAH 3

When God Repents

THE STORY OF Jonah



Jonah prophesies against the people of Nineveh. The king of Nineveh commands everyone in the city, including animals, to repent. Every living creature is to fast and cover themselves with sackcloth as a sign of their repentance.

FROM THIS WEEK'S RECORDING:

The narrator is trying to tell us something very important about the nature of God. ...

Mirroring takes place as a way to establish trust, to deepen connections, to demonstrate that you're not alone. "I'm going to be with you. I'll meet you where you're at." It's an absolutely essential ingredient in any relationship.

What God is doing in this passage is the ultimate in divine mirroring of his people. The people of Nineveh repented of their evil, and their evil is considerable. And what does God do? God repents of his evil. ...

Repentance is a humiliating act. ... This is God humiliating himself for the sake of ensuring that his people know that they are not alone. This is not the cosmic judge who stands above you, arbitrating your fate. It is a loving parental relationship who comes down off the bench and stands next to you, and says, "What should we feel now? I will feel what you feel, because I don't want you to ever be alone." ...

God is foreshadowing what he will ultimately do in Jesus. ... He has no problem saying, "You know what? I don't even have to act godlike. I can just experience what you experience. I promise."

That's why Jesus came. That's why this God decided to become a body. To be with us. And even here, you see an instance of the incarnation ...

— Shane Hipps

What do you think of Jonah's prophecy? Is he doing his best work here? Why, or why not? What is motivating Jonah? Have you ever acted this way? Why?

Is this story funny? How are Jonah and the Ninevites comical here? Why has this story endured for so long? Why do you think this story matters today? Do you see any parallels between behavior or situations in this story, and behavior or situations in your own life?

Do the Ninevites repent because of Jonah? Does God ask Jonah – or us – to change other people's hearts and minds? Is that our job? Does God leave us alone with insurmountable tasks, or is God doing the heavy lifting? Is this an invitation to check out, be lazy, and let God do God's thing? Could it be an invitation into freedom and aliveness, instead? How?

Does God repent? Is that an audacious claim? Is it offensive? Why, or why not? Why would God repent in this story? And what does that mean for us today?

How does the mirroring that Hipps describes establish trust? Does this story give us a glimpse into a God that is present with us? Does that matter? Why?

What do you want God to mirror back to you right now? What are you experiencing now that you need to see reflected in the face of God? And how would that help you?

What does this story tell us about our own relationships? How does it translate into our families, culture, politics, schools and corporations? Do we underestimate the power of not being alone? How does this impact the way we welcome other people, and seek to understand them?