

Meditation: Wisdom from the Minor Prophets (Jonah):
“Among Our Enemies - From Disorder to Re-order?”

Scripture: **Jonah 3-4; Matthew 5:43-48**

Rev. Mary Henderson Bowman

September 27, 2026



This morning, we are continuing the journey that we began last week with the Prophet Jonah.

We have been tracking Jonah’s journey in two important ways — geographically and also emotionally/spiritually.

When we last left Jonah, he was right in the middle of the transformational cycle that Richard Rohr named as the cycle of Order, Dis-Order, and Re-Order.

We watched last week as Jonah moved from Order to Dis-Order and he was still in dis-order when we left him. And yet he was not alone in the dis-order, God had been mercifully pursuing him.

As one commentator put it: “there is mercy deep inside our storms.”¹

Last week, our reading began with God’s call to Jonah to go and preach to Nineveh, the capital city of the Assyrian Empire.

And oddly enough, our reading this morning began the exact same way.

We are being reminded that chapters 1 and 2 were about Jonah’s effort to escape that call and to escape God.

As we read through the Book of Jonah, it is easy to focus on Jonah, but we don’t want to miss what God is doing and how it reveals God’s character.

As we hear the repetition of the call, we learn a lot about God.

¹ Tim Keller, *Rediscovering Jonah: The Secret of God’s Mercy*, 30.

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God has not given up on Jonah.

Our God is a God of Second Chances.

We are observing a God's whose mercy and love and compassion are super-sized.

So Jonah goes to Nineveh, but . . . Jonah is still struggling.

And God's super-sized mercy is one of the things that Jonah is struggling with.

You see, Jonah was a prophet to the king of Israel and so Jonah would have known first hand of the brutality of the Assyrian Empire. Jonah would have understood that Assyria was enemy number one.

And now God was calling Jonah to go into enemy territory to preach repentance. Jonah can't help wonder why God is giving the Assyrians a second chance instead of destroying them.

Deep down, Jonah is concerned that God will extend mercy to the Ninevites instead of justice.

And here is the challenge for Jonah — and for us . . .

Jonah accepted the mercy that God extended to Jonah after Jonah made a run for it.

When Jonah repents in the belly of the big fish, he is offered a merciful second chance.

The rub for Jonah is that . . . that same mercy, that undeserved mercy, that mercy that vomited him out of a big fish . . . it is the same mercy that God wants to offer the Assyrians and God wants Jonah to be a part of the mercy distribution.

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Is it any wonder that Jonah makes a run for it? It is too much for him.

So what do we make of God's mercy to the Assyrians?

And what do we make of Jesus' command that we should love rather than hate our enemies?

If we pause for moment to think about our own enemies, who comes to mind?

Who is making your life so difficult that you would call them an enemy?

Who has opposed what is good for you? Who is causing stress?

Who has caused suffering, anxiety, or pain?

We can find enemies at work.

We can find enemies at home.

We can find enemies in the world.

We can find enemies in strangers who violate us in some way.

We can find enemies among those we know well.

We can even find an enemy in the mirror, because it is true that sometimes we are our own worst enemy.

We are living in contentious times . . . like the Bible, it can feel that enemies are everywhere.

People who don't vote like we do.

People who don't think like we do.

People who don't practice religion like we do.

People who are a different color or nationality.

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People who are making our lives difficult . . . at work, in our families.

Enemies often have names . . . like “them” and “they” . . . like “other.”

And it is easy to practice what is called “othering.”

“Othering is when we focus on the ways that other people are different.

We focus on their strangeness.

And we reduce them to these characteristics until they are dehumanized.”²

Them . . . they . . . those people.

What are we to do with Jesus’ command to love our enemies?

Jesus Himself is, of course, not without enemies . . . and yet He does not indulge in hate or warfare or brutal conflict.

He follows His own teachings . . . all the way to the cross . . .

“Forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Did you notice how similar this is to God’s comment to Jonah about the Ninevites:

“they do not know their right from their left.”

God’s enemies are those who set themselves at odds with God’s purposes.

And in a certain way, Jonah is becoming an enemy of God.

Because God’s purpose is to love the whole world, to love all who bear God’s image.

And this all became too much for Jonah.

² Tim Keller, *Rediscovering Jonah: The Secret of God’s Mercy*, 33.

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God was not doing what Jonah wanted God to do when it came to the Assyrians.
God was not the God Jonah wanted.
Jonah couldn't put down his hatred or his grudges, especially since Assyria would remain a threat.

God was offering mercy when Jonah wanted justice.
It is important to remember that God does hold both justice and mercy.
Wickedness matters to God and yet . . .
God made it clear that God's love extends to people of different nationalities.
God's mercy extends to people of different religions.
God's compassion extends to people of different political persuasions.
God cares about each person carrying God's image.

As the chapter closes, we recognize that there will be no nice tidy ending.
Jonah is still stuck in dis-order. and God is still with him.
We are reminded that the journey through order, dis-order, and re-order often takes a lot of time in part because we have to pass through grief and forgiveness and a deeper understanding of God and ourselves.

Jonah's heart is not able to make sense of a God who offers mercy and justice to both himself AND his enemy.

Jonah would prefer to hate and that puts him at odds with God's call to love our enemy.

My friends . . .
Who would we prefer to hate rather than forgive?

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Who would we prefer to disparage rather than have compassion for?
Who do we think is undeserving of God’s mercy?

It is hard to love our enemy. It is easy to be angry.
But all things are possible with God — a God who stays with us, questioning our
anger, inviting a change of heart a God who gives us multiple chances and
extends us a super-sized mercy.

Thanks be to God.