



WAYSIDE  
Presbyterian Church



Michelangelo's "Jonah"  
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, 1508-1512

*"Encountering Jonah"*

*A Daily Devotional*

*by Joy Temple Ray*



## Forward

The devotional you are about to wade into is a journey of faith for the author Joy Temple Ray, as well as for each of us reading and reflecting on the Bible texts, meditations, prayers and challenges she provides. Joy has been a tremendous encouragement to me in my pastoral leadership and sermon preparation at Wayside Presbyterian Church. Over the years I have encouraged her to share her heart with the church, and then to consider writing her thoughts on one of her favorite Bible books, Jonah, in a devotional format for others to read and be blessed. While the current project was published in time for the ecclesiastical Season of Lent in 2017, this devotional can and should be used at other times throughout the year. It is not specific to lectionary texts for Lent. Our heartfelt gratitude is extended to Joy Temple Ray for giving so much of herself to this project that others may benefit in their own journey of life and faith. May you see yourself in these reflections, and like Jonah, be saved from your own “running away” to follow the will of God wherever the call of the Spirit takes you.

Shalom!

Rev. Dr. Stephen P. Fritz  
Pastor Steve

## Encountering Jonah

It's unexpected, the start of this journey. And, the depth of this unexpectedness didn't, at first, strike me as I read a few verses from Jonah in a daily devotional. Through those verses, I felt myself drawn into the scene created by the words. Over the coming weeks and months, I found myself reading and re-reading Jonah, pulled into a journey of my own, one I didn't know I needed to make.

It's not as though the story of Jonah is unfamiliar – who doesn't know the story about Jonah and the whale, right? Yet, there was a fresh understanding or new truth each time I thought about what I had read and dug a little deeper. Did you know the Book of Jonah is found in five of the Dead Sea Scrolls? Jesus referred to the "sign of the prophet Jonah" when confronted by the Jewish establishment. The emphasis on Jonah by Jesus opened more questions in my mind to what I thought I knew about Jonah. And I felt compelled to listen and be led to learn more.

I find that sometimes thinking I know the story can get in the way of my understanding the Biblical truths behind the storyline. Perhaps I need to be open to the emotion of a few words and allow them to enter our thoughtful spaces and rest there a few minutes. It's like peeling back the outer layers, exposing the inner places. I invite you to travel through the storyline and encounter Jonah with me for the forty days of Lent or for any season of your life and faith. Together, let's peel back the layers of what we think we know and not be afraid to expose ourselves to what God may reveal to us through Jonah.

~Joy

*Thank you, Lord, for your Holy Word handed down to us through the ages. Please help us as we study Jonah to thoughtfully seek out deeper understanding and come away renewed with fresh insights. Lead each of us forward in our faith journey with You we pray.*

Reference for “sign of the prophet Jonah” - Matt 12:38-41 and Luke 11: 29-32

NOTES:

I use the New King James Version of The Bible. Other versions might have different words or verse phrasing. I think it will be interesting to find how using different versions may bring us to similar or different considerations for what we’ve read. Please share your thoughts and insights.

Each day’s reflection will include room for you to make your own notes or write your own prayer. Additional scripture is also offered, but don’t feel limited to these selections. Please make this your own journey.

## HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND FOR JONAH:

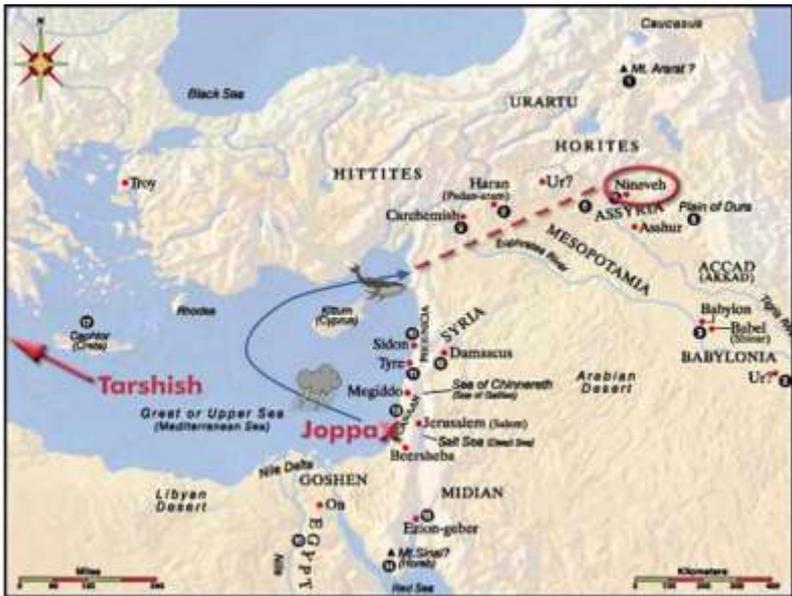
**Who is Jonah?** His background begins in 2 Kings 14:25 where he is mentioned as a prophet from Gath Hopher. It is generally believed his prophecy took place around 750 BC. Outside of the reference in 2 Kings, the Book of Jonah and Jesus' mention of him, nothing else regarding him is recorded in the Bible. Jonah lived in a time of turmoil both within the nations of Israel and Judah as well as wars with surrounding nations. There was a lot of "doing evil in the sight of the Lord" in the times of the Kings, and prophets were called to cry out against evilness by providing warnings of God's judgement and revelation of God's forgiveness and mercy when the people "turned from their evil ways." Michelangelo painted Jonah on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, next to his painting of Jesus.

**Gath Hopher** was a border town for the tribe of Zebulun, under the kings of Israel. Per Google Maps, this small village in the Galilee region sat on a hilltop in the grape-growing district and not far from Cana, the town where Jesus turned the water into wine at a wedding. Today it is believed to be the town of El Meshed.

**Nineveh** was the central city of Assyria and located about 500 miles west of Gath Hopher, along the east bank of the Tigris River. The Assyrians were continually battling against the Israelites even though their lineage was also from the sons of Noah. To travel to Nineveh, Jonah would be leaving his country and entering the area of an enemy nation. Today, across the Tigris sits the city of Mosul. The people of Mosul revere Jonah, building the "Mosque of the prophet Yunus" (Jonah) built over his (supposed) burial site in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Portions of the city walls and two city gates had stood since around 700 BC with some stabilizing reconstruction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In July 2012, ISIS destroyed the tomb and mosque. It has been reported that ISIS also destroyed the gates in 2016.

**Joppa** is east and less than 100 miles from Gath Hopher. An Israelite port and trade city along the Mediterranean Sea, it was first built by the Phoenicians who were master ship-builders and sailors. Cargo ships filled with trade goods and merchandise routinely traveled all around the Mediterranean.

**Tarshish** is believed to be on the southern coast of Spain, about 2,000 miles farther east and across the Mediterranean Sea. Trade ships travelled there to both deliver and pick up cargo.



## Day #1: Read Jonah 1

1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load.[a] But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, “What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish.”

7 And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, “Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?”

9 So he said to them, “I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, “Why have you done this?” For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. 11 Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?”—for the sea was growing more tempestuous.

12 And he said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.”

13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said, “We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man’s life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.” 15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and took vows.

17 Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

## Reflections on Jonah 1

### Day #2: “Arise, go... and cry out” - Jonah 1:1

The mission God is giving Jonah is to go to an enemy nation and give God’s message about their wickedness. “Why” would be the question I imagine Jonah thinking. Why go to these people, who fight against us to destroy us? Why should they be given a message that may save them so they can war against us even longer? Why are they even deserving of God’s consideration?

As I consider the words “arise, go and cry out” I’m struck by the action and immediacy these words portray. This message God wants delivered is critical. No matter who I am, no matter where I am, God wants me to know that He offers mercy. And just as He called Jonah to deliver this message, He calls us to cry out. Mercy is God not giving us the punishment we deserve; grace is God giving us the forgiveness we don’t deserve. Good news to share indeed!

*Merciful and Loving Father, help us to have a heart of compassion for others. Teach us to be Your ambassadors in this world and not be afraid of what compassion calls forth in us.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Proverbs 3: 1-8; 2 Cor. 5:18-6:2

Notes/prayer:

### Day #3: “flee...from the presence of the Lord” – Jonah 1:3

The journey from Jonah’s home to Nineveh is 500 miles going westward. Tarshish is 2,000 miles going eastward. It occurs to me that this might have been the western boundary of the known world during the time of Jonah. So, to him this could have been fleeing to the end of the world. And so, I ask myself: how far IS far enough?

How do I “flee from the presence of the Lord?” I’m considering the times I avoid dealing with difficult situations or emotions, going to sometimes great lengths to keep from doing something that I know God wants me to do. Are these my “Nineveh” moments? Am I not Jonah “fleeing”? And what about the times I think I can mask my wrongdoing - hiding out in the bottom of the boat, hoping God won’t notice me there?

I find two telling cross-references for the fleeing section. Psalm 139, verse 7: “Where can I go from Your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?” And, Jeremiah 23:24: “Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?” says the Lord; “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the Lord. Fortunately for us, God can always find us and we can always find Him.

*Thank you, Heavenly Father, that Your love is always there to be found by us. Forgive us for our fears that cause us to flee away from rather than fly to Your embrace.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 139: 1-12; Jer. 23: 23-24

Notes/prayer:

#### Day #4: “a mighty tempest on the sea” – Jonah 1:4-9

The reading about a storm on the sea creates a tensing of my stomach and uneasiness. I am subject to motion-sickness and if you have ever experienced it, you will understand my reactions. There is no “good” place on a boat in a mildly stormy sea, let alone one stirred to the point of making the boat unstable. But my reading this verse again opens into a new train of thought away from my anxiety of sea-sickness and into this revelation: God stirs things up. He sent the wind to roil the sea.

Jonah was “asleep” in the boat. Was it a sleep of complacency? Was he wrapped up in his smugness of being a Jew thus feeling entitled to be uncaring of his shipmates – they were on this boat together, regardless of what he thought of them. I’m not too eager to see myself as Jonah with these thoughts. I close my eyes and sense the wind in my face – God stirs things up in me.

I’m reminded that Jesus was asleep in a boat during a storm and when the disciples awakened him, thinking he didn’t care about their outcome, he said to them “Where is your faith?” Not because of my smugness am I saved, but because of the compassion of God, who sent Jesus - the wind to stir me up and the grace to set me free.

*Holy Father and Merciful God, please help me through my times of tempest and turbulence as you stir me up and into Your kingdom. Help me to keep my eyes on Jesus with a believing and grateful heart.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Matt. 14: 22-33; Mark 4: 35-41; Luke 8: 22-25;

Notes/prayer:

## Day #5: “Why have you done this?” Jonah 1:10

At first, this question puzzles me. Looking back at the action of the last several verses, the sailors and captain have called upon their gods in fear of perishing. When Jonah is finally boxed into a corner and makes his statement about why he is on board and that he “fears the Lord”, their response is still fear- not anger, just fear. They don’t attack Jonah. They don’t threaten him. They don’t, with malice, throw him out with whatever cargo remains. There is no rush to judgement on him by his shipmates. Instead, they ask him a question, “Why have you done this?”

His clear statement of faith in who God is seems out of alignment with what his preceding actions imply. And this left the people around him puzzled. Hmm... I wonder how often the people around me are left with questions when my actions or words don’t live up to the faith I profess? But equally important, I am pained to realize how little I stop to consider the question of “why have you done this” for others rather than quickly pronounce my judgement on their actions or words.

*Thank you for questioning me, Lord, and not rushing to judgement against me. May I learn patience and seek to understand those I encounter so that both my words and actions will proclaim me to be a child of You, a loving and compassionate God.*

Additional scripture to ponder: John 3:16-17; Romans 4: 8-13

Notes/prayer:

**Day #6: “pick me up and throw me in...” – Jonah 1: 11-12**

Jonah’s statement of response to their questions seems flat and unemotional. Throw me in and the sea will calm for you, he says. I struggle with the simplicity of his statement for a situation that is decidedly not simple. Is his statement to demonstrate compassion for the other sailors? Has Jonah determined that anything is better than resisting God? Is this his statement of repentance by acknowledging his action of disobedience caused the storm? I read the two verses again.

As I ponder, two points emerge. Jonah makes a statement of faith – the sea will calm after he is thrown into it. Through these words, he gives up his efforts to control, not just this situation but all of what has led up to this point. He acknowledges that control rests with God and in God he puts his faith. Not a flat response after all I find – simply one of a faith that the God who controls the storms of life is also the God of forgiveness and mercy.

*Heavenly Father, please pick me up and throw me back into Your loving embrace when my faith is dim and my vanity leads me into turbulent places.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 86; Rom. 8:31-39

Notes/prayer:

**Day #7: “Nevertheless the men rowed hard...” – Jonah 1: 13-16**

The storm continues to rage about them with the boat nearly floundering; *however*, the sailors make a valiant effort to save everyone, including Jonah. *In spite of* what Jonah had told them, they choose not to throw him overboard. They continue to risk their own lives in order not to take his, as they don't expect he will survive in the water.

Compassion is defined as “to suffer with” or sorrow for the sufferings of others with the urge to help. As I've studied Jonah I have been reading “Compassion, a Reflection on the Christian Life.” In the book's introduction, the authors state that we need to question our understanding of what compassion is, what it means to us and what compassion calls forth in us. “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish.”

*However...in spite of... nevertheless ...* they rowed hard – deep words to ponder, here filled with compassion.

Additional scripture to ponder: Phil. 2: 1-11.

“Compassion, a Reflection on the Christian Life,” by Henri J. M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison – quote found on pg. 4 of revised version 1989.

*Lord Jesus, please increase my understanding and equip me with the courage, patience, and humbleness You call forth in me to live compassionately in this World in Your Name.*

Notes/prayer:

**Day #8: "...the sea ceased from its raging." – Jonah 1: 15-16**

When my siblings and I were young children, our parents took us to the ocean. Our father, who loved the ocean, taught us how to body-surf. We would get out just beyond where the waves curled, lined up parallel to the beach, and with both excitement and trepidation listen for his call either to wait for a better wave or "this is a good one, get ready, go, go, go!" We would tuck our heads between our out-stretched arms and jump in front of the mounting curl of water and paddle like crazy hoping the wave would pick us up and carry us into the beach.

Sputtering water and wiping our eyes clear, we would call to one another about how good we rode it and run after Dad, back out into the ocean to await the next good wave. Once we began to show signs of exhaustion, Mom would walk into the water from her guard-duty of us on the beach, and tell us (including Dad) that it was time for a break from riding crashing waves and to come in from the water for a little while, enticing us with the promise of a snack. As I sat in prayer and meditation this morning thinking of what to write today, this memory came to rest in my mind.

In Jonah 1 we have been out in the water, awaiting the waves, jumping into the curl, paddling like crazy and sputtering with the sea foam and water in our eyes. The wisdom of my Mother to see signs of weariness from the exercise and call us in reminds me that studying the Word intensely and looking for the right wave of discernment needs pauses for rest and refreshment.

Yes, Jonah is in the water, but we already know the big fish is following him. So, it's time to come ashore and rest for the day.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! This is the day the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 23; Ps. 103: 1-5; Ps. 118: 19-24

Notes/prayer:



## Day #9: “...offered a sacrifice to the Lord” – Jonah 1: 16

Two images rise from the still sea: Jonah down in the water and the sailors offering a sacrifice to God. There is no record here of what Jonah is thinking - he is silent in the water. What is recorded is what was taking place in the boat – the sailors’ awe of the power they had witnessed, offering vows and sacrifice to this powerful god. From the water emerges their first step of faith - in the Almighty God who stilled the water, has saved their lives, and whom Jonah introduced to them.

I am reminded of the experience the disciples had in which Jesus walked on the water toward them as they clung to a boat in a turbulent sea and Peter’s challenge to Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” He steps from the boat and starts across, but becomes afraid and falters. Jonah had faith, but his faith faltered. Peter had faith, but his faith faltered. I have faith, and yes, my faith also falters.

In Henri Nouwen’s book “Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life” the experience of Peter’s walk is recounted with these telling words about faith:

“As long as Peter keeps his eyes fixed on Jesus, he can walk on water. Problems are small and fears bearable when we know who calls us. The Lord looks into us, smiles, stretches out both his hands, and invites us to get out of the boat: “Come to me, be not afraid.” We will not succeed if we stay in the boat. We will not survive if we look down at the waves. But we do not have to look down and drown. Jesus calls us to look up and forward to the one who stands in the midst of the storm.”

*In the midst of my faltering steps, I cry out to you, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”*

Additional scripture to ponder: Matt. 14: 22-33; Mark 9: 23,24

“Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life,” by Henri Nouwen, with Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird, 2013- quote found on pg. 129.

Notes/prayer:



## Day #10: "...the Lord had prepared..." – Jonah 1: 17

This verse, like many others scattered throughout The Bible, is filled with the mystery of God. I, personally, love the mystery. I am awed to know there's a Creator God who creates and positions planets to orbit in an endless space and at the same time creates the microscopic chromosome threads that make up a microscopic DNA fiber which forms our individual make-up - each one of us slightly different from any other. Like snowflakes and leaves. Who else but God thinks this big and this small at the same time? God's creative spirit is unfathomable in our distinctly limited human understanding.

What the "great fish" would be that swallowed Jonah doesn't matter. For me, I see Jonah swallowed up by God's unexpected mercy, an undeserved rescue and place of shelter created for him by God's grace. I, too, am witness to how God extends His grace, taking the perfect form needed for my situation, offering me undeserved rescue and a place of shelter.

*Loving and gracious Father, Your creative and imaginative spirit is beyond my comprehension and yet, I have felt your gentle touch upon me, guiding me and sheltering me. Thank you, with all of my heart, for Your saving grace.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Lam. 3: 21-26; Heb. 4: 11-16

Notes/prayer:

## **Day #11: Read Jonah 2**

2 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly.

<sup>2</sup> And he said:

"I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction,  
And He answered me.

"Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,  
And You heard my voice.

<sup>3</sup> For You cast me into the deep,  
Into the heart of the seas,  
And the floods surrounded me;  
All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.

<sup>4</sup> Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight;  
Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

<sup>5</sup> The waters surrounded me, *even* to my soul;  
The deep closed around me;  
Weeds were wrapped around my head.

<sup>6</sup> I went down to the moorings of the mountains;  
The earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever;  
Yet You have brought up my life from the pit,  
O Lord, my God.

<sup>7</sup> "When my soul fainted within me,  
I remembered the Lord;  
And my prayer went *up* to You,  
Into Your holy temple.

<sup>8</sup> "Those who regard worthless idols  
Forsake their own Mercy.

<sup>9</sup> But I will sacrifice to You  
With the voice of thanksgiving;  
I will pay what I have vowed.  
Salvation *is* of the Lord."

<sup>10</sup> So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry  
*land*.

## Day #12: "...prayed...from the fish's belly." – Jonah 2: 1

Jonah is in a sinking boat, in a violent storm, thrown from the boat into the water, is swallowed into a place that assuredly isn't hospitable and is there for three days and nights – and then decides to pray?

Yikes! Sitting here in my kitchen, typing away, I think why in the world didn't he start praying a tad sooner.

In the midst of my head shaking over this, I am reminded of a time when I turned my back on God and thought I could go it alone. I was not in a good place; I was not making good decisions. I don't know why I went to a local church's New Year's Eve prayer service, but I did. There were few people there, the sanctuary was quiet and dimly lit. I don't remember much about the service. As we left, we each were to pick up a small, folded piece of paper with a scripture written on it. I returned home before reading mine.

Why do we sometimes wait for desperate times and dark places before we pray? I don't have a good answer for this question. I suggest that Jonah didn't have a good answer either. What about you? Maybe Jonah just didn't know what to pray - no words seemed right. I've been there too.

*Dear Heavenly Father, you know my heart and my needs even when I have no words. Lead me away from the desperate times and dark places I've put myself in and teach me to pray in all times and in all places.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 23; Matt. 26: 36-46

Notes/prayer:

## Day #13: "...I cried out..." – Jonah 2: 1-9

Jonah's prayer reads like a psalm, doesn't it? Since there was no written Bible during his time, he had probably committed to memory the psalms read and taught at the Temple. He acknowledges that the Lord answered him when he cried out, that his voice was heard. His words are descriptive and emotionally telling of his ordeal in the water, desperate times for sure. He ends with "a voice of thanksgiving" declaring "Salvation is of the Lord." And, yet, he's still inside the dark place.

My folded piece of paper had this written on it: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitudes of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions."

(Ps. 51:1)

One verse can make a profound difference, can change everything, can create a yearning that we don't even know we have. That night, I yearned to pray but could not find words. So, I just started reading my Bible... I find the right words, words beyond what I could imagine, are there.

*Dear Heavenly Father, you know my heart and my needs even when I have no words. Lead me away from the desperate times and dark places I've put myself in and teach me to pray in all times and in all places. Thank you for hearing my cries and providing Your living and holy Word to lead me home to You.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 51; Rom. 8: 26-28

Notes/prayer:

## Day #14: “...worthless idols” – Jonah 2: 8

I puzzled over verse 8 found near the end of Jonah’s prayer. It doesn’t seem to flow well with the words leading up to it. A cross-reference leads me back to the times and events in Israel. The people had set aside the statutes and practices established by Moses and had started worshipping idols of foreign gods. This, in part, is why Jonah was called to be a prophet – to remind the Israelites of what their worship should be and warn them against setting up idols replacing God.

Jonah states there is no room on the altar for both God and our idols. Hmm... what “idols” do I have that hold me back from worshipping God, causing me to forsake His mercy? Jesus speaks of treasures in Matthew and how we cannot remain divided in our heart as to what we treasure.

Is it how I spend my time? Is it how I use my money? Is it how I value my opinion over others? Hmm... I see a whole lot of “I” and “my” in these questions. Ah yes... I see that attitude is where I need to start cleaning house.

*Forgive me, Lord, for the idol of “self” that gets in the way of worshipping You. Please help me to be aware when my attitude needs corrected and speak Your words of correction into my heart. I want to serve You, Lord.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 96; Matt. 6: 19-24;  
Rom. 12:9-17

Notes/prayer:

**Day #15: “... vomited Jonah out” – Jonah 2: 10**

According to Webster’s dictionary to vomit is to “discharge, throw out with force or violence.” The use of this word tells me that this was not a gentle landing - Jonah didn’t calmly walk in from the water to the shore. I’m struck by the significance of the word “vomited”. As I picture the scene, Jonah, along with whatever else was around him, is hurled onto the sand. It’s forceful - it’s not pleasant nor pretty.

Nobody like to think about vomit, or to see it; but, sometimes I have to experience it. It is a way my body cleanses my internal system from contamination. In Rev 3:16 it says God will vomit out the “lukewarm church” – because their works were neither hot or cold. A complacent wipe won’t get this mess cleaned up, germs may remain; scrubbing is required.

I look again at the scene of Jonah hurled onto the sand. Now I also see that God’s mercy has sustained him and shredded to pieces the sins that stained and disgraced him. I see Him vomited from the hold of those sins onto the cleansing sand of God’s grace. Hallelujah, I see that I too can be cleansed from the vomit! God’s grace sustains and strengthens me!

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”*

Additional scripture to ponder: Rev. 3: 14-22; I John 1: 5-2:2; Ps. 19: 7-14

Notes/prayer:



### Day #16: Read Jonah 3

3 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying,

Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?



10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

**Day #17: "...the second time..." – Jonah 3: 1-3**

As I read these two verses what jumps out to me is this: God provides second chances. It's not a do-over but another opportunity for Jonah and for Nineveh to get God's message of mercy and grace. The second chance is offered, not demanded – there is no forcing, just a statement to "Arise" and "go."

I'm thinking again about my folded piece of paper and realizing that Jonah and I were restored to dry land, not a resort beach, but dry land. I have a choice as to what direction I will take, once again. What about you? Do you recognize a second chance God's provided for you?

The journey in front is still daunting; there is no promise it will be smooth or without sacrifice. The one thing I resolve in myself is that going back to where I have been is no good. I find these verses in Psalm 119 that resonate in me as a prayer for my way forward through the dry land...

*Dear Lord, please let Your word be a lamp for my feet and a light on my path forward toward the places of Your bidding. Thank you for Your mercy and grace, forgiving me and providing me second chances to attune my thinking, praying and doing each day toward Your purposes.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 119: 105-12; John 1: 1-13; Matt. 5: 13-16

Notes/prayer:

**Day #18: “So Jonah arose and went...” – Jonah 3: 1-3**

The book is silent here as to what Jonah was thinking while walking to Nineveh. Per Google Maps, the most direct walking route would leave Israel and cross through Jordan and Syria and into Iraq. Calculating an average hiking speed on the Appalachian Trail (AT) of about 15-20 miles a day, walking 500 miles will equal 25-33 days to walk to Nineveh.

There’s a lot of room for contemplation in 25 to 33 days of placing one foot in front of the other, up the knobs and down the sags in the terrain. Plenty of time to consider all that has transpired and to wonder what lies ahead. I am reminded from my AT experience that solitude and contemplation can be restful, even invigorating, despite the physical effort of walking. Becoming mindful of the present moment allows me to hear the birds call in the canopy around me. It lets me see the dancing of the sunlight among the leaves gently swayed by the breeze. It allows my mind to shift through the clutter of thoughts and memories. And, just as I need to mind where I place my next step, I need ask God to direct my thoughts toward what is important.

Yes, there needs to be room for contemplation. So, I, in solitude and contemplation, silently walk with Jonah today. I hope you too will find rest in quiet moments for contemplation.

*Thank you, Lord, for the quiet moments of rest when I feel Your presence around me, whether walking in nature or sitting with my Bible spread open on my lap, or wherever I find quiet spaces in this day.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 23; Phil. 4: 4-9

Notes/prayer:

### **Day #19: “Nineveh, that great city” – Jonah 3: 1-3**

With Jonah, we’ve crossed the dry land and arrive at a place where the cityscape of Nineveh is in sight. We’ve crossed 3 national boundaries and once we cross through the city gate, we’ll be inside the city walls.

The extent of this city is too large for Jonah to see the whole of it. I imagine that what he could see is the wall extending in both directions, an entrance gate with buildings and people and animals inside. He could also see there was a “great” job in front of him...I pause here with many questions swirling inside my head.

What is God’s view of “great”? Is it great in size, great in need, great opportunity? I think about Jonah’s spiritual boundaries that put limitations on his view of other, not so great people. Hmm... what boundaries of spiritual understanding do I closely guard that keep me from seeing God’s view of great? What “great” job might God have in store for me?

*Father God, thank you for expanding the boundaries of my understanding and setting no boundary on Your compassion for me. Teach me how to be compassionate with those I meet in Your name.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 100; Matt. 13: 45, 46;  
John 13: 34,35

Notes/prayer:



## Day #20: “yet forty days” – Jonah 3: 4

The message God gave to Jonah to speak to Nineveh starts by setting a time parameter of forty days. I started writing today filled with historical and symbolic information. Before I could finish, I left for an appointment. Along the road, I saw a billboard that read: “Three words that mean business...” (followed by the name of a bank). Honestly, I just had to laugh out loud.

Jonah is looking people in the eye and telling them they have forty days before their lives as they are living them will come to a screeching halt. When Jonah looks me in the eye and says “you have forty days,” the significance of that very day changes. I know that every day I have is a gift from God; but I don’t always value the gift I’ve been given. I’m too quick to complain and too slow to be thankful. I’m not mindful of living each day putting on love as I’m called to do as a Christian. If I only have forty days and today is day one... I need to live as though there are only forty days in front of me EVERY day.

What about you? What if Jonah looks you in the eye?

Here is my revised billboard: God’s three words that mean business ... yet forty days. Use them wisely.

*“Teach us, Lord, to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Let Your work appear to Your servants. And establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands.”*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 90: 12-17; Col. 3: 12-17;  
Rev. 22: 12-14

Notes/prayer:

**Day #21: “proclaimed a fast” – Jonah 3: 5-9**

As Jonah walks through the city sections over the three days, word gets out. He moves street by street, section by section and people are already talking about his message, but crowding close to hear for themselves. The people of Nineveh are in crisis mode. They prepare a radical response, a full departure from their daily lives. Everyone from peasant to king to animal is included. Their actions for repentance are vividly imaged in the text: fasting, sackcloth, ashes, cry out and turn away. There is a restlessness and uncomfortable atmosphere throughout the city... and in every inhabitant. I can sense it too.

It doesn't take very long to feel the first effects inside the body of no water and no food - a dry mouth and throat, a rumbling emptiness. It's uncomfortable and worrisome. Hunger and thirst swallow up my self-confidence and self-control... my soul cries out.

Let's sit quietly for some moments today and contemplate what the hunger inside is calling forth in us... praying for the presence of the Holy Spirit's nourishment.

*Father, fill me, I pray, with a hunger and thirst for righteousness.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Isaiah 58: 1-5; Matt 5:5 and 6: 16-18

Notes/prayer:

**Day #22: “covered himself with sackcloth” – Jonah 3: 5-9**

Sackcloth, according to Wikipedia, is a coarse, woven material likely made with goat hair. It was used in Biblical times as an outward sign of penitence and mourning. It wasn't meant to be stylish or comfortable.

The king leaves the throne, takes off his kingly robe and puts on sackcloth. He takes off the vestments of pride and power and covers himself in humbleness. The everyday of familiar and acceptable is set aside to meet the call for radical change. What do I need to set aside for sackcloth?

Let's pause a few moments today, thinking about what change inside may be needed... so that through God's mercy we can be re-fit and re-sized with the new thinking and doing in His name.

*Merciful Lord, turn me inside out. Change my sackcloth to Your armor.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Isaiah 58: 6-9a; Rom. 13: 11-14; Eph. 6: 10-19

Notes/prayer:



**Day #23: “sat in ashes” – Jonah 3: 5-9**

Thinking of sitting in dirty ashes that cling and stain led me to consider the source of the ashes – fire. I am reminded of a solo in the “Messiah” that recounts the refiner’s fire. It is taken from the Book of Malachi. Malachi was the last prophet before John the Baptist, who came some 400 years later. Malachi prophesied of a coming messenger and condemned the people of Israel for their ongoing sinfulness. It is the last book of the Old Testament.

The purpose of the refiner’s fire is to burn away impurity so that the ore remaining is pure and of highest value. Sitting in ashes... the crackling flames and heat surround me... impurities to burn away... what is most precious to God will remain...

*Holy God, burn my impurities into ashes and purify my heart for You.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Isaiah 58: 9b-11; Mal. 3: 2-6;  
2 Tim. 2: 19-21

Notes/prayer:



### **Day #24: “turn from” – Jonah 3: 5-9**

The Ninevites turn from their evil ways in hopes that God will turn from their destruction. There is an acknowledgement by them that all the physical signs of repentance are not enough. They need to do more. I see the shift of focus here – from outward change to inward change, from individual action to community action, from self-centered to God-centered.

By now you have, no doubt, noticed that portions of Isaiah 58 have been provided as additional scripture for each day since the beginning of the fast. Today, Matthew 6: 16-18 is also referenced. As I’ve been reading and praying for discernment of the message from Jonah, I’ve been drawn to these two passages regarding fasting. This morning, as I begin writing, an additional passage from Matthew calls to me.

Where do I fit in all of this? What needs shifted in my thinking and doing? These scriptures swirl around inside my mind... I think I need to take a walk and think this through with God. A prayer walk...

*Holy God and Father, please let Your words be a lamp unto my feet and light onto my path today and always.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Isaiah 58: 1-13; Matt. 6: 16-18; Matt. 23: 23-28

Notes/prayer:

**Day #25: “Who can tell...” – Jonah 3: 5-9**

The people’s cries of fear and despair become quiet as the king addresses them in verse 9 and offers hope. Hope for God’s mercy.

The work of refocus and realignment of my relationship with God reminds me of who I am and who God is and prepares me for the gift of God’s mercy.

*Dear God:*

*Through the dry times when I hunger for guidance... I hope for Your mercy.*

*When I’m discomfited and itchy with fear and despair... I hope for Your mercy.*

*As the flames of wrongful words or deeds burn in my heart... I hope for Your mercy.*

*When I wander astray into dark places... I hope for Your mercy.*

*Hear my plea, I pray.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Isaiah 58: 14; Joel 2: 12-14;  
Heb. 6: 17-19

Notes/prayer:



**Day #26: “God saw their works... and God relented” – Jonah 3:  
10**

The end of Chapter 3 is good news for the people of Nineveh... and for you and me. This is a day to celebrate and thank our God! Mercy is God not giving us the punishment we deserve; grace is God giving us the forgiveness we don't deserve.

*I praise Your name, Oh Lord! From the depths of my soul, I praise Your name. For Your mercy endures forever! Hallelujah!*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 103; Micah 6: 6-8;  
Heb. 4: 12-16

Notes/prayer:



## **Day #27: Jonah 4**

4 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the Lord, and said, “Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!”

4 Then the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the Lord God prepared a plant[a] and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah’s head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

9 Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

And he said, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!”

10 But the Lord said, “You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?”

**Day #28: “...displeased Jonah exceedingly...” – Jonah 4: 1-3**

In the 4<sup>th</sup> verse of chapter 3, Jonah enters the city and proclaims God’s message. The balance of the chapter provides the reactions of the city inhabitants. Where is Jonah now that the message has been delivered? I neither see nor hear him in amongst the people. He is invisible and silent... until the opening verse of chapter 4. He emerges out of the shadow displeased. Webster’s Dictionary uses these words as meaning for displeasure - to be disagreeable, annoyed, offended, to disapprove. Exceedingly speaks for itself.

Standing aloof. Silently seething inside. Perhaps stoic faced with steely eyes watching. Seeing the fear on the faces but not willing to look with compassion into their eyes. Hearing the cries of anguish but not willing to listen with compassion to their words. I am reminded that it was Jonah’s choice to react as he did.

Situations arise around me every day – and each time I choose how I will meet the situation. I can silently seethe when things don’t turn out as I think they should. I can be disagreeable, annoying, offended, and stand aloof disapproving. Or, I can accept that the situation is in God’s hands, accept His outcome and ask to be brought out from the shadow of “displeased exceedingly” and into the warmth of compassion. Jonah reminds me how important this choice is.

*Dear Father God, please warm my heart, mind and soul with Your soothing balm of compassion...for myself and for others.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 25: 4-18; 1 John 3: 16-23

Notes/prayer:

**Day #29: "...became angry. So he prayed..." – Jonah 4: 1-3**

I find myself pondering the contrast between these two prayers of Jonah. In the chapter 2 prayer he expresses his gratitude for God's mercy in saving him from death. But in this prayer, he expresses his anger for God's mercy in saving others and wants death for himself. Jonah wants mercy to be shown, but only under those certain conditions that he believes are justified. Hmm...

Justice can be defined as receiving a deserved reward or penalty. So, in Jonah's eyes mercy must be deserved. And that's why he is angry with God, who shows mercy to both the deserving and undeserving.

What does justice mean to me? What does mercy mean to me? How do I interpret these words in my thoughts, vocabulary and actions?

*Help me Lord as I seek to discern Your Word.  
Open my eyes to the truths of Your Wisdom.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Prov. 2: 1-9; Eph. 2: 1-10

Notes/prayer:



**Day #30: "...in my country..." – Jonah 4: 1-3**

Jonah's complaint to God is that he had forecast this outcome before he left his country. He didn't want to leave home and travel away from all that is familiar and comfortable. I wonder if he threw in the comments on God's graciousness to sweeten the complaint a bit.

In researching what was going on in the kingdom of Israel during Jonah's time, I find there is a smugness in the religious leadership; that they are the chosen people of God is very evident in how they think about themselves and others. The Jewish laws are upheld but not necessarily in ways that reflect God's mercy and compassion. Keeping this mind, I find it easier to understand Jonah. Thinking about it leads me to consider how I value "my country" in practicing my religious beliefs and use it to view others.

In "Compassion" by Henri J. M. Nouwen and others, having a competition mentality versus a compassion mentality is described. "Being compassionate would require giving up dividing lines and relinquishing differences and divisions. ... to participate in the compassion of our Creator God, Jesus requires us to unmask the illusion of our competitive selfhood, to give up clinging to our imaginary distinctions as sources of identity, and to be taken up completely into intimacy with God."

Is my vision of others set for zoom lens or panoramic when I consider "in my country"? Do I practice religion without compassion?

*Thank you, Lord, for challenging my thinking and encouraging me to seek out and learn what compassion means.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Matt. 23; Rom. 12: 9-21  
"Compassion" by Henri J. M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, 1989, quotes from pages 18-19.

Notes/prayer:



**Day #31: “Then the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” –  
Jonah 4: 4**

I’ve read this verse many times as I’ve studied Jonah. I admit that I still have difficulty wrapping my understanding around it. It’s stated simply but it is complicated in action. First of all, I didn’t expect God’s response to Jonah to take the form of a question. Yet, as I dig into scripture, I see that God’s responses often take a form of open-ended, thought-provoking words. God encourages dialog with a questioning mind, it seems.

Secondly, I’m struck by two specific words in the question – right and angry. Rights are an important part of our social and political fabric. Even as I write this, there is much vocal social contention over what is a right and whose rights take precedence.

The definition of right is complicated. It can be used to indicate something a person has a just claim to, such as a privilege granted by law. It can also mean a correct thought or statement, such as the correct answer. I question how “right for you” should be considered here. And just as importantly, how does the definition matter in my relationship with God?

Please read with me the additional scripture to ponder. This is the parable of the prodigal son. As we read this, let’s view the scenes as though we are the elder son – the one who stays at home.

*Father God, in this one question You’ve provided, I see much to consider. Help me as I look for the meaning You intend for strengthening my relationship with You.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Luke 16: 11-32

Notes/prayer:

**Day #32: “Then the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” –  
Jonah 4: 4**

The second word in the question is angry. Angry was used earlier to describe Jonah’s state of mind, but this time God is using it as an action word – to be angry. It’s ongoing, not just a quick or past emotion.

According to Webster, anger includes tightening, constricting, inflammation and distress as well as resentful and revengeful feelings. To be angry is to continue holding the emotion. I think this holding on to anger is what God is questioning rather than a momentary response.

I recently read “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Nouwen in which he provides much insight into the anger of resentment through studying the elder son. He describes this as “lostness – characterized by judgment and condemnation, anger and resentment, bitterness and jealousy – that is so pernicious and so damaging to the human heart.” He goes on to say that this lostness is much harder to identify compared to the outward behavior of the younger son. I’m including the prodigal son scripture again today, concentrating on the verses about the elder son.

So, I find myself questioning: how does holding on to anger affect my relationship with God?

*Father God, in this one question, I see much to consider. Help me as I look for the meaning You intend for my relationship with You.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Eccl. 6: 8-12; Luke 16: 22-32  
“The Return of the Prodigal Son, A Story of Homecoming” by  
Henri J. M. Nouwen

Notes/prayer:

### **Day #33: “might see”– Jonah 4: 5-7**

If Jonah had left the city on the west side, he could have started his trek back to Israel with his calling to warn Nineveh completed. He could be grateful he survived delivering the message to an enemy city and he can now return home. Instead, he left the city on the east side and constructed a shelter... so he might see the city. Why? He knows God has relented from the destruction. So, why is he staying and watching?

On January 25, 2015 Pastor Steve’s sermon was titled, “Exploring the Call of God: Resistance” and the accompanying scripture was from Jonah 3. He included in his comments that morning some of what occurred in chapter 4 as well. As I listened, I was also thinking about my personal study of Jonah and found myself making notes. Two words emerged and sparked in my mind: brood and fret.

The definition for brood includes to morbidly worry over and dwell on one’s own thoughts. The definition for fret includes to gnaw or wear away at a worn place of worry. I can’t say for sure that these emotions were Jonah’s as he sat in his shelter watching. But, I know that I too forsake gratitude and hide in my shelter brooding and fretting when I don’t like the outcome or the situation isn’t what I want. One of my notes from that Sunday is accept that God controls the situation. Accept and trust and be grateful. I need to keep praying and reminding myself of this.

*Dear Lord, thank you for reminding me to trust and obey and be glad.*

Additional scripture to ponder: Eph. 2: 4-10; Phil. 4: 4-9

Notes/prayer:

**Day #34: “God prepared a worm” – Jonah 4: 5-7**

There is so much vivid imagery in verse 6 and all of it comes from God’s creativity and mercy. Jonah is grateful – for the moment. However, a worm appears in verse 7. Worms can kill plants from the inside out – under the bark you can’t see them but you can see the effect as the plant slowly dies.

I ponder these two verses, trying to capture what God is conveying to Jonah... and to me. My second note from Pastor Steve’s message is this: toxic thoughts and attitudes kill a relationship, just as the worm kills the tree. Once again, God in His infinite mercy provides life-saving wisdom. Will Jonah see it? Do I see it in my own situations?

*Dear God, I confess my toxic thoughts and attitudes to You. Please preserve me through Your Mercy and Grace. With gratitude, I come to you in prayer this day over this situation....*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 25: 1-15; Luke 6: 37-45

Notes/prayer:



**Day #35: “a vehement east wind...and the sun” – Jonah 4: 8-9**

No shade from the brutally hot sun and relentless, hot wind blowing dust into his eyes, Jonah feels pushed to the limit. At the breaking point, he is still filled with such anger and resentment that he is angry enough to die for it. Is this symbolic of his own hell, I wonder?

It is here, at this point, in chapter 4 where I begin to see God’s call for me to learn about compassion through Jonah. In Nouwen’s book “Compassion,” he reminds me that God chooses to be with me and stay with me, even in my moments of pain, of suffering, my problems and times of confusion. He states “We will never really know God as a compassionate God if we do not understand with our heart and mind that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14 NRSV).”

Jonah doesn’t need to sit in the hell of his anger. Neither do I. God is bigger than my anger and offers to sit with me as I read and pray and find my way home...to Him.

*Through You is life, and You are the light of all people, the light that shines in the darkness. Shine in my life and take the darkness away, I pray.*

Additional scripture to ponder: John 1: 1-18; 2 Cor. 5: 14-21  
“Compassion” by Henri J. M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, 1989, pages 11-13, quote from page 13.

Notes/prayer:

### Day #36: "pity" - Jonah 4: 10-11

All through the four chapters, the plot has moved by divine activities. In these final verses, God uses pity to describe how Jonah felt about the plant that dies and then uses pity again to describe how He felt about Nineveh and its inhabitants. Both these verses are in the form of questions. Questions posed by God about pity.

There is something else I see in these final verses. Do you see it? God's questions are left hanging, unanswered. *The story stops, but doesn't end!* It's left open...

I catch myself glancing over at my favorite bookmark. Doctors without Borders sent it to me years ago, and I keep it tucked in my Bible at Jonah. As I've read and typed, the bookmark is often in my sightline. It's a photo of Nigerian women and children in a line with a makeshift fence between them and the photographer. Printed boldly beside the picture is: "COMPASSION KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES".

Jonah walked across boundaries and through the gate of a foreign city to bring this very message from God. I'm not sure if he ever understood the message God has for us. But through encountering Jonah, I believe I'm getting a glimpse.

*Father God, thank you for expanding the boundaries of my understanding and setting no boundary on Your compassion for me. Teach me how to be compassionate with those I meet in Your name.*

Additional scripture to ponder: John 4: 7-14; John 6: 35-40;  
Heb. 4: 12-16

Notes/prayer:

### Day #37: Some final thoughts...

Why do we need Lent? Lent belongs to God and reminds us of who we are. The character of God is that there is yet hope for salvation. The same God sends us into the world. It is through our sharing compassion that we reveal the mercy and grace of God to our neighbor.

On Easter Sunday 2015, Pastor Steve spoke about the good news of Easter. My notes from that sermon lay open beside me as I type. We have traveled through Lent by encountering Jonah and my notes remind me why I am here and what I can expect for tomorrow:

Let go of Friday – trust Sunday.

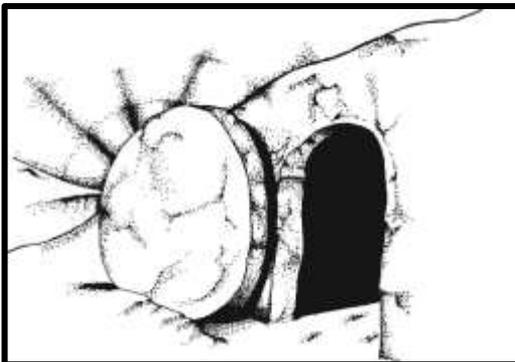
Who will roll away the stone for us... the stone is already rolled away.

You seek Jesus... He is not here. Jesus is the grave robber.

He's not on the cross of Friday. He's risen. TRUST SUNDAY. GO AND TELL.

*You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, to the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord, my God, I will give thanks to You forever. Hallelujah for Easter Sunday!*

Additional scripture to ponder: Ps. 30; Mark 16: 1-8; John 3: 16-17









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