

March 2023 – Pastoral Message

“Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, ‘I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.’” – Jonah 2:1 NRSVUE

Beloved Neighbors in Christ,

Grace and peace to you, my family, and friends, in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once again, Mother Nature has thrown a wrench into our worship and seasonal schedule, so we postponed the Ash Wednesday worship service a week later to Wednesday, March 01, 2023, at First Lutheran in Winthrop. I hope you had the chance to make it to the rescheduled service and enjoyed a light meal with folks from the other parish communities in our area. May the imposition of ashes on your forehead, or the back of your hand, remind you of our human mortality and frailty. What seems like a life-ending reminder is truly an invitation to make each day a new beginning, in which we are washed in God’s mercy and forgiveness. With the ashes placed upon us, it is also a remembrance of our baptism that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

For the season of Lent this year, I wanted to mirror the same conversation and instruction that was done with our NICWoW youth toward the end of 2022. Each week we examined a section of the story of Jonah, witnessing God’s call upon us and how we sometimes run the other way when we hear the voice of the Divine. Similar to the time of Lent itself, Jonah allows us to journey into the depths of the human experience – including death, delusion, new life, disappointment, and even anger. Despite the serious themes of the text, the book of Jonah is humorous and lighthearted, offering a carefree and cheerful approach to how our faith lives within us. This opens us the opportunity to explore often difficult topics like repentance, death, and self-destructive action. The book of Jonah also leaves the prophet in an “unfinished” state. That is, God remains faithful to Jonah even though the main character remains largely unchanged. At the heart of Lent is a relentless and loving God who refuses to leave us when sometimes we leave God, and our lives are unchanged as well.

I invite you to enter into Lent this year with the chance to discover a biblical character that some of us may relate to, though is foreign to our understanding. Scripture from Jonah is seldom used in our lectionary cycle so it may be a convenient time to hear the words of another text and reflect on it during this penitential time before Holy Week and Easter. Please join us at the three congregations on Wednesday evenings during March and early April and I look forward to seeing you soon! Keep the faith, beloved!!!

In Christ,

Rev. Erik Karlson

Pastor, Neighbors in Christ Parish