

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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The Book of Jonah

A True Fishing Story!

- 1. The Lord caught Jonah (and us)**
- 2. So that we might catch others**

**Hymns: Hymns: 223 – 253 – Distribution: 469,
338 – 565 (vv. 1,2)**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Readings:

- Jonah 1:1-5,11-12,15-17*
- Jonah 2:1,10 and 3:1-5,10*
- Jonah 4:1-11*

Have you heard any good fish stories lately? You're probably familiar with the term "fish story." A fish story means that when you're in the boat and a fish gets away, it was about so long. (Hold up hands) Later on when you're talking to your wife, the fish was this long. (Hands farther apart) At work on Monday, the fish was this long. (Hands still farther apart) And in future years as you recount the story over and over again, the fish was this long. (Hand even farther apart) Fish stories are usually stretched quite a bit, if not altogether false!

Today we're going to look at a fish story. However, there's quite a difference between a regular fish story and this story. This story has not been stretched. It is altogether true and reliable. Today we will learn Jonah's True Fishing Story:

- 1. The caught Jonah (and us)**
- 2. So that we might catch others**

1 – As we begin our look at Jonah today, I can think back to when I learned about Jonah when I was young. I put Jonah in the category of many other great heroes of faith that are remembered in the Bible: Peter, Paul, Noah, Abraham, and David. But Jonah actually has some rather undesirable qualities that we're not too impressed with! It seems he had been trained well and was qualified to be God's prophet, but his attitude was pretty bad!

We read, "The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.' But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD." Jonah is not willing to do what the Lord asks of him!

It is true that Jonah had a tough assignment. God commanded him to go preach at Nineveh, which was no small assignment. It was about 500 miles NE of the Holy Land. It was a non-Jewish city in a non-Jewish country, and it was a huge city. It would be as if the Lord said to you, "Go preach on the street corners of Mexico City!" Yet even though this command from was from his God who would be with him, Jonah wants no part of this. In fact, he ran the opposite direction! Most scholars today think that Tarshish was located in modern day Spain. Instead of heading for Nineveh in the country of Assyria, Jonah headed to the exact opposite side of the known inhabited world. This was outright rebellion!

Yet God wanted to "catch" Jonah, putting this in fishing terms. God showed tremendous love by not letting him off the hook. It didn't appear to be love that God was showing, but it truly was love! Instead of letting Jonah successfully go off on his path of a sinful attitude of rebellion, a path which would eventually lead to hell and its punishment, the Lord sent a storm. The great storm terrified the sailors that Jonah was traveling with, and he told them that it was because of his rebellion that the Lord was sending this storm. And at Jonah's own command, they threw him into the sea to appease God.

God could have left him in the ocean to die. But again, his love shines forth. If Jonah were repentant about his sin after seeing the storm, through faith he could have been brought to heaven as he lost his life. But God was so loving, he gave him a second chance. He had greater plans for Jonah in this life; he still wanted him to be a missionary! And so he sent a big fish to swallow Jonah and preserve his life in a miraculous way. What love!

This shows us clearly how God "catches" people. On the Sea of Galilee in the Holy Land, many fishermen use a net. This is God's choice of method also when he catches people! Matthew 13 tells us, "The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous."

God is not a spearfisher. God does not even use a rod and reel with a hook on the end of it. No, God “catches” people with his Word! He doesn’t harm them, but saves them! What love that he would do this for Jonah, and lead him to repentance in his stay in the big fish as he prayed: *“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD.”* Jonah had been a wiggly fish, and he would wiggle a lot more in the book of Jonah, but **God in his love caught him!**

It’s interesting that God in his grace even used the story of Jonah as a sign of what Jesus Christ our Savior would one day do for mankind. In Matthew 12 Jesus said, *“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* (Matthew 12:40). After Jesus would suffer and die for the sins of the world, he would be in the tomb for three days. But he would not stay there, because as the Victor over sin and death he could not be held by the grave. He would rise again to assure us that our salvation is complete!

Are we rebellious like Jonah? We’re certainly not rebellious like people we read about in the paper, people who:

- Bring guns to schools
- Start fires that become raging blazes
- Break into people’s homes and assault them
- Hurt their children and grandchildren
- Fly airplanes into buildings

However, we need to be careful in estimating our own rebellion! For the Bible tells us:

- *“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”* (Romans 8)
- *“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.”* (1 John 3:4)

Our sin is rebellion! We have been:

- Children who have smarted off to our parents
- Children who have lied
- Children who have hurt and excluded others at school

- Teens who have defied curfew
- Teens who have been nice to the teacher’s face, but not behind it
- Teens who have been sexually immoral
- Teens who have hurt others with sharp words
- Adults who have broken their marriage vows by not cherishing their partner every day, or showing love as Jesus has shown us
- Adults who have knowingly broken commands and laws of God because we wanted to!
- Adults who get so angry they sin with hurtful words and actions

Thank God for his love! He sent his own Son as the Savior who would fulfill the “sign of Jonah” and win our salvation. Through Jesus our sins are forgiven.

Also, thank God that at some time in your life he “caught” you like he caught Jonah. One of the great heresies of our day is called “decision theology.” Some misguided churches will tell people that they have the power to convert themselves. Or the power to at least cooperate with God in their conversion. Or to “not resist” as much as others, to their credit. What does the Bible say about our “catching” ourselves? *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* (1 Cor. 2) **Thank God he has done all the work of catching us!**

2 – But that’s not the end, for God still had plans for Jonah and he still has plans for your life now. We read, *“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’”* What a privilege to be given a second chance by God to be his missionary! The “caught” will now “catch”! Jonah then journeyed the long distance to Nineveh and preached the message God gave him. What success God gave Jonah’s work there! Word of Jonah’s message made it all the way to the king himself, and he declared a fast and a time of repentance! Jonah’s message was effective by the power of the Holy Spirit!

However, we see how Jonah had a bad attitude even though God gave his message success. In an almost unbelievable exchange with God, Jonah shows that he’s not happy with the situation!

- *“But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, ‘O LORD, is*

this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."
 Jonah was upset that the city believed! It makes us wonder if he had some racist feeling against these non-Jews, and wanted them to continue in their rebellious ways without faith in God's forgiveness!

- *"Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city."* Jonah went outside the city and sat on a hill, hoping that there would be some fireworks anyway – fire, brimstone, destruction!
- We also read that Jonah became very upset that the vine that provided him shade died, so angry that he hardly cared about those repentant souls anymore!

We can't be happy about Jonah's continued attitude problem when it came to God's "catching" the people of this large city. In fact, it makes us marvel all the more that God could be so effective through a reluctant prophet. Even though Jonah possibly might have not been giving it his best effort, **the Lord used him to "catch" others! What love!**

We now can evaluate one major reason God has left you in this life. We are to go "catch fish" now. The Lord has told us: *"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."* (Mark 16:16,17)

You might be aware of what our church's Mission Statement is. Do you know it? It's *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 18:19,20) A good question to ask today is: What are you doing to help your church fulfill its mission? How sad it would be if a member of our church would say:

- I have no objections to our Mission Statement, but I won't be bringing any visitors with me.
- I believe outreach should receive money in our church budget, but I won't ever talk to visitors who worship here at church.
- I think we should have an Evangelism Committee, but my only personal efforts at

witnessing will be the offerings I bring to church.

- Somebody should do door-to-door inviting to our church, but I won't ever participate.

How sad it would be if one of our church members were heard saying:

- Our church is big enough.
- Our school is too diversified
- "I don't want to!"
- "I don't have time to!"
- "I'm not qualified to!"
- "I'm sure that fish would never listen to what I have to say!"

How sad it would be if our nets weren't even in the water, but we were simply waiting in the boat to arrive at heaven. May God forgive us for the times we have been unwilling missionaries!

After all, the Lord has provided what we need:

- The net
- The fish
- The directions
- The opportunities
- The words to say
- The success!

May God help us fish. And may he bless our efforts, as he alone gets any credit for any success that our words may have.

That's your fish story for today. It's one that different from a regular fish story, because it is absolutely true and reliable. May we all learn valuable lessons from the reluctant missionary Jonah. **The Lord caught us to go catch others.** May we do this cheerfully, and pray that God would work eternal results through us! Amen.