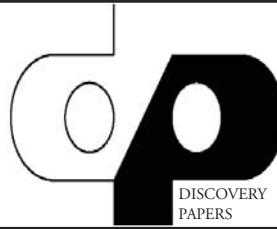


# JONAH, RUN

**SERIES: GOD OF A SECOND CHANCE**



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Jonah 1:1-16

1<sup>st</sup> Message

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Let's acknowledge from the start that the Book of Jonah is weird. It features a fish that serves as an inn, a city of 120,000 wicked people who all repent in an instant, a plant that grows like Jack's bean stock, and a reluctant prophet who sparks an unprecedented revival even though he does virtually everything in his power not to. It's a weird story. It's also a surprising story, with plot twists aplenty. It's also a mystery; most importantly, it's a mystery.

The mystery concerns the protagonist, Jonah, a prophet of Israel. The mystery, which emerges at the outset, is this: why is Jonah so opposed to doing what God asks him to do? Thus it is a character mystery. As such, it has much in common with filmmaker Oliver Stone's *Nixon*, which attempts to answer questions about the character of U.S. President Richard M. Nixon, but not until the end of the film. As a character mystery, the Book of Jonah invites us to identify with the protagonist and examine, and perhaps discover, our own motivations.

Of course, the hero of the story isn't the prophet of Israel; it's the God of Israel. Therefore, as we explore the Book of Jonah, we not only discover ourselves, we also discover God.

Jonah lived during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who ruled over the northern kingdom of Israel from 793 to 753 B.C. (2 Kings 14:25). The date of the composition of the book of Jonah is unknown.

## Too busy

In the movie *Hook*, Peter Banning, a middle-aged corporate lawyer played by Robin Williams, is a busy man—too busy, it turns out. While he's talking on the phone, discussing a deal, his children are making noise, forcing him to abandon his call. He angrily confronts them: "Will everyone just shut up? And leave me alone for one moment? . . . I'm on the phone call of my life!" The film portrays Peter as a man running away from who he is, especially who he is as a father.<sup>1</sup>

Peter Banning runs. He has plenty of company. Have you run, are you prone to run, or do you have the sense that you may be running even now—from who you are, from what you're supposed to do? Jonah, like Peter Banning, runs, but God pursues him. Can Jonah slow down long enough to listen to God? Can we?

## Jonah rises

Jonah 1:1–3:

**Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."<sup>3</sup> But Jonah rose 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, away from the presence of the LORD.**

Jonah is identified as a prophet in that "the word of the Lord" comes to him. In the Hebrew Scriptures, when the word of the Lord comes to a prophet, the prophet invariably conveys that word. Some, like Jeremiah, hem and haw at first, but all deliver the message. The Lord commands Jonah to "arise," and that's precisely what he does. The surprise—the shock—comes when we read that Jonah rises not in obedience to go to Nineveh, as expected, but in disobedience, to flee to Tarshish.<sup>2</sup>

Why Tarshish? Although the precise location of Tarshish is unknown today, it was west of Israel—far to the west, possibly as far away as Spain. Nineveh, on the other hand, is northeast of Israel. Jonah, commanded to go to Nineveh, heads in the opposite direction. Tarshish was among the distant coastlands that had not heard of the Lord (Isaiah 66:19), and Jonah was fleeing *from the presence of the Lord*. Jonah understands that the Lord is *the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land* (Jonah 1:9), who knows all about the goings-

on in Nineveh, a distant land. Jonah knows that he can't actually escape the presence of the Lord, but he hopes that in Tarshish, home to neither Israelites nor Israelite prophets, he will hear no more from the Lord. Perhaps he hopes that the Lord, if he's committed to the mission, will send someone else. In any event, Jonah wants to get as far away from Nineveh—and from the word of the Lord—as possible.

But why? The narrator tells us why the Lord commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh (*their evil has come up before me*), but he doesn't tell us why Jonah refused to go. At this point in the narrative, we can try to fill in the blank with the aid of other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures.

First, although prophets of Israel at times spoke against other nations, they didn't travel to those nations to do so. The word of the Lord to Jonah represents a significant, and unexpected, expansion of the prophetic vocation. Nineveh was more than five hundred miles away, across a desert. Jonah may be thinking: not my job.

Second, the Lord commands Jonah to go to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, a hated and exceedingly wicked enemy of Israel that would eventually conquer the northern kingdom of Israel, where Jonah resided, in 722 B.C. The Assyrians were known to be exceedingly wicked (Nahum 2:11-12, 3:1-9). For Jonah to *call out against* Nineveh meant for him to proclaim the Lord's judgment against it. The only information we're given about Jonah in the Hebrew Scriptures, outside the book that bears his name, would seem to indicate that, as a prophet from the north, he was a fervent nationalist (2 Kings 14:25). Although Jonah might relish the opportunity to call out against Nineveh, in the manner of the prophet Nahum, he would presumably prefer to do so within the friendly confines of his homeland.

Today, the ruins of ancient Assyria are across the river from the Iraqi city of Mosul. Interestingly enough, in June of this year, Mosul fell to Islamic State, the wickedness of which mirrors the wickedness of Nineveh. We can imagine, say, a brother of one of the two U.S. journalists who were beheaded by Islamic State earlier this year calling out against it, here in the U.S., but we can't imagine him going to Mosul and doing so. He would most likely suffer the same fate as that of his brother. Jonah may be thinking that the Lord is ordering him to go on a suicide mission.

Third, Jonah may be wondering whether the Lord has some sort of redemptive purpose for crying out against Nineveh. The *evil* of Nineveh has come up before the Lord, but the word can also be translated along the lines of *disaster*, as it is by the ESV in Jonah 4:2. Is the Lord equally troubled by the human disaster that has proceeded from the evil in Nineveh as he is by the evil itself? Perhaps Jonah, an apparent nationalist, fears that proclaiming the Lord's judgment against Nineveh, in Nineveh, will amount to a warning that a hated enemy could possibly heed, thus thwarting any lust for judgment that Jonah may be nursing.

Fourth, if Jonah, as a prophet, pronounces judgment and the Lord turns back from that judgment, then doesn't Jonah end up with egg on his face? Who wants that?

Jonah is a man of considerable means, for he's able to pay the fare in Joppa, a port city on the Mediterranean, for the long voyage to Tarshish, which would be expected to take about a year. Jonah's voyage is not only depicted as being in the opposite direction from Nineveh, it is also depicted as a descent of sorts. He *went down* to Joppa, and he *went down* into a ship. His downward journey has only begun.

## The Lord hurls a storm

Jonah 1:4–6:

**But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup>Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. <sup>6</sup>So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."**

The Lord refuses to take no for an answer from Jonah and troubles the waters in order to give his wayward prophet a second chance. But where's Jonah as the storm rages? He's sleeping down below. The captain, desperate to rouse Jonah, wants to know why he's

sleeping instead of doing his part to save the ship. It's all hands on deck—except for Jonah, who's under the deck. As readers, we want to know how Jonah is even able to sleep, impervious as he is to the *great* wind and *mighty* storm.

First, Jonah went *down* to Joppa; then he went *down* into the ship. Now, he descends further, going *down* literally into the *lower* part of the ship. There, in the bowels of the ship, he literally *lay down and fell deeply asleep*: he descends further still. The wording suggests that Jonah was experiencing a special state of deep sleep, perhaps something trance-like. Jonah's sleep comes off as a psychological defense mechanism. Jonah's objective, remember, is to flee from the presence of the Lord. He not only goes west when the Lord wanted him to go east, he also goes down—way down—when the Lord wanted him to look up to him. Jonah doesn't want to hear from the Lord, so he falls so deeply asleep that the Lord can't even get his attention with a life-threatening storm.

The captain of the ship, though, manages to wake Jonah. He implores Jonah, *Arise, call out to your god!* What had the Lord told Jonah? *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it.* Jonah runs away, descends, and falls asleep in order to keep from hearing from the Lord, but the word of a pagan sailor echoes the word of the Lord. The captain uses the same two verbs, *arise* and *call out*, unwittingly reminding Jonah of the word of the Lord.

Although what the captain implores Jonah to do is different from what the Lord ordered him to do, Jonah's God is involved in both directives. The sailors had each called out to their gods, to no effect, and the captain wants Jonah to call out to his god—or gods, if he has more than one—in the hope that those aboard *may not perish*. And we wonder, because the captain's words so closely echo the words of the Lord, whether the Lord's intent in commanding Jonah to arise and call out against Nineveh was so that Nineveh *may not perish*.

## Are you running?

It's surprising to us, if we're familiar with the ministry of other prophets, that Jonah doesn't deliver the word of the Lord. Many of us express a desire to hear from God so that we may know what he wants us to do. But, do we really want to hear a word from the Lord? It may

depend on what that word is. It may come as a surprise to us that we may not be as receptive to a word from the Lord as we think we are.

We don't know why Jonah ran, at least at this point; therefore, the narrative asks us if we're willing to trust the Lord whatever his word to us might be. What if the Lord were to ask you to do something that you wasn't your job? What if he were to ask you to do something that involved risking your life? What if he were to ask you to do something that could bless an enemy? What if he were to ask you to do something that could cause personal embarrassment? What if he were to ask you . . . whatever? And, well, we know the Lord has a penchant for stretching his people. How far do you want to be stretched? A little bit? Not at all?

Is there any part of Jonah that resides in us? Are we prone to run from God and from his word to us? Are we, perhaps, running even now? Although we haven't boarded a ship bound to Tarshish, is there any way in which we have run from God for fear of what he is saying, or might say, to us?

Jonah checks out by running; then he checks out by sleeping. The contemporary version of Jonah's flight is incessant busyness. We don't run or lie down to fall deeply asleep, the way Jonah did. In fact, many of us have trouble falling to sleep at all because we can't shut down our over-occupied minds at the end of the day. No, we fall so deeply into busyness that the Lord can't even get our attention with something like a life-threatening storm. Busyness is our psychological defense mechanism. With busyness, we check out.

Busyness is attractive in many ways. Everyone's busy, and if you're not busy, you feel as if you're missing something, and if there's one thing we don't want to do these days, it's miss out. Many people and forces expect, even demand, our attention—and don't we crave fulfilling expectations? Busyness makes you feel productive and important, even spiritual, especially if you're about the Lord's work. Busyness also tends to dispel anxiety. It saves us from having to be alone with our thoughts. Busyness saves us from having to hear the truth; it saves us from having to hear from God. Are you so busy that you can't hear from God? Are you so busy *because* you don't want to hear from God, for fear of what he is asking you to do?

Pink, the pop music star, sings:

*I don't wanna be the girl who has to fill the silence  
The quiet scares me 'cause it screams the truth.  
Please don't tell me that we had that conversation  
I won't remember, save your breath, 'cause what's  
the use?*<sup>3</sup>

Are you filling the silence because it screams the truth? Have you heard from God in some way but, like Jonah, would you prefer not to be reminded of it because you don't want to be stretched?

Does Jonah rise and call on his God, the god who started the storm and the only god who can stop it? Jonah didn't rise and call out against Nineveh; neither does he rise and call out to his God, at least as far as we know. Jonah hears the word of the Lord in the word of the captain, and he has no interest in obeying the word of the Lord or even in quieting the storm. He seems quite willing to die, and to bring the entire ship down with him, rather than obey the Lord. The sailors will have to resort to other means.

## The lot falls on Jonah

Jonah 1:7–9:

**And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup>Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" <sup>9</sup>And 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."**

The casting of lots was on occasion used by God's people to discern his will, though the results were not always considered automatically valid (Proverbs 16:33). It was a more common practice among pagans, who use it here to good effect. The Lord, who in some manner put words into the mouth of the pagan captain, cooperates with the pagan sailors, fingering Jonah. The sailors don't necessarily believe that Jonah is responsible for the storm, for they ask him to tell them

*on whose account this evil has come upon us.* The lot falls to Jonah—meaning, they hope, that he knows who's responsible for the storm.

The sailors press Jonah with questions, hoping to squeeze from him information that can save them. In so doing, they remind Jonah of who he is and what he's supposed to do. What's his occupation? He's a prophet. Where does he come from, what's his country, what's his people? He's a prophet of Israel, in the service of the God of Israel, from whom he is running.

Jonah can run, but he can't hide. He can't escape from the Lord. He can't even escape from himself. Backed into a corner, Jonah comes clean. He identifies himself as a "Hebrew," as a Jew would be known to Gentiles (Genesis 40:15, Exodus 1:19). He fears, or worships, the Lord, although not so much lately. The Lord is not only the God of Israel, he tells the sailors, he is also *the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land*—in other words, he is the God who made everything, the creator God, far superior to what pagans deemed their gods capable of. *The sea is his, for he made it / and his hands formed the dry land* (Psalm 95:5). If he's the God of heaven, who controls the heavens, he can hurl a great wind and stop a great wind. If he made the sea, he can calm the sea. If he made the dry land . . . well, wouldn't the sailors like to set their feet on some dry land right about now?

## The sailors call out to the Lord

Jonah 1:10–14:

**Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.**

**<sup>11</sup>Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. <sup>12</sup>He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." <sup>13</sup>Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous**

against them. <sup>14</sup>Therefore they called out to the LORD, “O LORD, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.”

If Jonah feared the Lord in a worshipful sense, the sailors become *exceedingly afraid*, being caught up in matters beyond their understanding and control. What does Jonah, as a prophet of the God of heaven and earth—who by the way, is on the run from his God—advise the sailors to do? Give him the old heave-ho—not row hard for dry land. Might the Lord, if he saw the ship heading for dry land, turn off the wind? Perhaps, if he believed that Jonah was heading to dry land to fulfill his commission. But Jonah has no interest in fulfilling his commission. He’d rather die—and die in the sea, a particularly terrifying prospect for Israelites, for the sea was the abode of evil. On whose account has this evil come upon the sailors? Jonah comes clean: *it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.*

Instead of throwing Jonah overboard, the sailors head for dry land. Can they trust Jonah’s directive, inasmuch as he’s been less than forthcoming with them, at least until he had to be? And if they’re in Dutch because a prophet of the God of heaven is on board and they dispatch said prophet, might not said God be none too pleased with them? And if Jonah is an errant prophet, might returning him to dry land prove that they’re no longer willing to shelter him, and might doing so allow him to fulfill his commission? Better to row for it, they figure.

Uh, not: *for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.*

Now what? It’s looking as if they’re going to have to throw Jonah overboard. But before doing so, they do something quite remarkable. The Lord commanded Jonah to *call out* against Nineveh, but Jonah refused. The pagan captain implored Jonah to *call out* to his god, but as far as we know, Jonah refused. What do the pagans do? They, not the prophet of Israel, *call out* to the Lord, the God of Israel. They do what he’s supposed to do. Without trying to, they show him up. At every turn on the ship, Jonah is reminded—and reminded by pagans, in a humiliating way—of who he is and what he’s supposed to do. The sailors ask the Lord not to

hold what they’re about to do against them while expressing the belief in his sovereignty: *for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.*

## The sailors fear the Lord

Jonah 1:15–16:

**So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. <sup>16</sup>Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.**

Finally, the sailors follow Jonah’s advice: they throw him overboard. Jonah was right: the sea quieted down for them. The Lord answered the pagans’ prayer: they didn’t perish for Jonah’s life, and the Lord did not lay on them Jonah’s blood, which turned out to be not so innocent. What would have happened if Jonah, instead of the pagan sailors, had prayed? Well, we don’t know, because Jonah, as a fugitive from the Lord, had no appetite for prayer.

As for the pagans, they become what Jonah was, or even more than what Jonah was, or what Jonah was supposed to be. First, the sailors were *afraid* when the storm raged. Then, when Jonah said *I fear the Lord*, they became not simply afraid but *exceedingly afraid*. Now what? After listening to a prophet of the Lord and after calling out to the Lord themselves, *the men feared the Lord exceedingly*. During his time on the ship, the Israelite was a worshiper of the Lord in name only. Now that he’s off the ship, the pagans he left behind are worshipers of the Lord. That’s not to say necessarily that they abandoned their other gods. They may have simply added the Lord to their collection. Nevertheless, since leaving Joppa, it’s been quite a voyage for the pagan sailors.

## Is God pursuing?

The Lord is relentless, not to mention creative. He gives us, as he gave Jonah, a second chance. If we won’t slow down and listen to him, perhaps he’ll send, or allow, a storm-like crisis into our lives. A crisis is what finally got the attention of Peter Banning in *Hook*. After his children were kidnapped, he had to in a sense become a child again in order to become the father he was supposed to be.

If a crisis won't get us to slow down and listen, perhaps the Lord will take a more subtle approach, such as putting his words, words we've heard before, in the mouth of another person, even someone who has no relationship with him, creating an artistic echo so that we might hear him. Has someone who apparently wants nothing to do with faith ever reminded you in some way concerning what you're supposed to do? The Lord is not beyond using the casting of lots, a roll of the dice, or a spin of the wheel. Has someone ever asked you probing questions, such as those the sailors asked, that made you face into who you are, what you believe, and what God wants you to do? When we have no appetite for prayer, for fear that we might hear from God when we pray, perhaps God will lead other people, even skeptics, to call on him in order to persuade us to listen to him and do what we're supposed to do. Perhaps you'll lead people to the Lord despite yourself, while you're in full flight from him, the way Jonah led the pagan sailors to the Lord.

At different points in my life when I didn't want much to do with the Lord, he used me to lead two people to Christ. At one such point, early in my career as a journalist, a distraught co-worker pulled me aside, confessed that she was in crisis, and said she wanted to talk to me because she felt somehow that I knew what was right. Uh, really? Me? All I knew to do was tell her about Jesus, though I wasn't following him very closely at that time. When you lead people to Christ when you don't even want to lead people to Christ, that's when you know God is trying to get you to slow down and listen to him.

Do you sense that God may be pursuing you—either overtly or subtly? Who are you? If you're running, slow down. In fact, in a sense, you've already slowed down: you're reading this. Really, who are you? If you believe in Jesus, you're a child of God, even if you haven't been thinking or acting like one lately. Have you been running from God for fear of what he is asking you to do or might ask you to do? If so, you're not only running from God, you're also running from yourself, from who you are, from your destiny, from what you're supposed to do, from what only you *can* do. Jonah may have wished that God would have sent someone else to Nineveh, but God, for reasons known only to him, called Jonah. Only Jonah could go to Nineveh. Only you can do whatever it is God is asking you to do. What he asks you to do may be a stretch, even a big stretch, but it's

completely consistent with who you are as a child of God. Therefore, at some point, what he asks you to do will resonate with who you are.

The Father asked Jesus, our Lord, not to go to Nineveh (only Jonah could go to Nineveh), but to go where only he could go: a hill outside Jerusalem. In so doing, the Father stretched him more than any human has ever been stretched, but it was completely consistent with who he was as the Son of God. Jesus, of course, went in obedience to the Father *and for the joy that was set before him* (Hebrews 12:2).

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, both directly, when God spoke to Jonah, and indirectly, through the events on the ship. Does it come to us? Indeed it does, not only through the Scriptures but through the events of your life. Therefore, listen to your life—and listen to Frederick Buechner:

*We are so used to hearing what we want to hear and remaining deaf to what it would be well for us to hear that it is hard to break the habit. But if we keep our hearts and minds open as a well as our ears, if we listen with patience and hope, if we remember at all deeply and honestly, then I think we come to recognize, beyond all doubt, that, however faintly we might hear him, he is indeed speaking to us, and that, however little we may understand of it, his word to each of us is both recoverable and precious beyond telling.*<sup>4</sup>

The word of God to each of us is both “recoverable” (it is knowable) and “precious” (it resonates with us, even if it challenges us). There's something precious about going to Nineveh that Jonah is missing. Is there something that we're missing? Something about the Lord's word to us being precious?

In the end, running from God and running from yourself isn't very effective, not to mention very satisfying. In John Updike's breakthrough novel, *Rabbit, Run*, Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom, makes a mess of his life and, instead of facing into his problems, starts running—literally. When Rabbit runs, he feels good. After writing that Rabbit runs, Updike simply writes this: “Ah: Runs.” Running from God, running from who you are, and running from what you're supposed to do can feel liberating, at least for a while. That Updike, who died in 2009, wrote four more novels about Angstrom demonstrates that, from his perspective as a

writer, running from your problems doesn't work. (By the way, I stole Updike's title for the title of this sermon, changing the name from Rabbit to Jonah. Also by the way, for many decades now there has been a collection of American male authors, Updike among them, who are fascinated by the bored, married, suburban male. Needless to say, in their boredom, the protagonists almost never find God, though occasionally they search for him, as in some of Updike's novels, and more often than not they have affairs.)

## Take a breath

Are you running—from the Lord, even from yourself, perhaps by keeping yourself busy? Is the Lord pursuing you, either overtly or subtly? If he's pursuing you, it's so that you might slow down, listen to him, and come to terms with who you are.

Slow down. S-L-O-W D-O-W-N.

This is not a call to inactivity. Jonah was supposed to be active. He was commissioned to *do* something—three things, actually. God commissioned *arise, go* to Nineveh and *call out* against it. Jonah was active in the wrong way because he didn't want to be active in the right way. This, therefore, is a call to slow down for the sake of discerning how to be active in the right way.

This imperative will be especially challenging for those in particular stages of life and those whom God has placed in demanding jobs for which long hours and constant availability seem to be required. I would simply ask you to slow down long enough to ask God if he wants you to slow down and what it might mean for you to slow down.

At first, before trying to rearrange your life in any way, consider a practice that will not require any restructuring, rebalancing, or reprioritizing. Consider something that won't even require you to make any new space in your schedule. What might that be?

An 11-year-old girl on my daughter's soccer team has become a scoring machine this year. I've watched her, and even coached her, in recent years, and she's always been the fastest person on the field but a sporadic scorer—until this year. She's still the fastest player on the field, but now sometimes she's outscoring opposing teams all by herself. What happened? She told me her

coach gave her a tip that has made all the difference. He told her, "Before you shoot, take a breath." She says that one piece of advice has helped her orient herself, slow things down, and shoot accurately.

You're running all over the field, so to speak, from home to work, from meeting to meeting, from drop-off to pickup, from school to store, from class to class, from work to home, from iPhone to email, from website to website. Before moving from one event to the next, take a breath. Inhale and exhale. When you inhale, think to yourself, *Abba*. *Abba* is an Aramaic word for "father" that Jesus used when addressing God in an intimate, trusting manner. Then, when you exhale, think to yourself, "I belong to you. *Abba*, I belong to you": two syllables in, five syllables out, corresponding to your natural breathing pattern. That's it. Take a breath. See if it helps you orient yourself, slow things down, and hear from God.<sup>5</sup>

## Halloween party

A few weeks ago, our family received an invitation to a Halloween costume party hosted by some people we had met in our community. I didn't want to go. I don't like Halloween. I didn't have a costume, I didn't want to get one, and I didn't want to wear one. I felt we were already over-scheduled, and, by the way, I was preparing a sermon that would urge people to slow down. I had already attended enough social events recently, thank you very much. Therefore, I sent my regrets: I declined the invitation. Then, during my morning prayer time, I simply brought the issue before the Lord, without trying to judge my response one way or the other. Most mornings, I try to take a breath—a long breath—to start the day. Then, at junctures throughout the day, I take a short breath, thinking to myself, "*Abba*, I belong to you." At our pastoral staff meeting, we looked at Luke 10:1–2, where Jesus sends out the seventy-two to enter houses and eat and drink what they are given. Then Alice Yan, our children's pastor, volunteered that I could use one of the costumes from the children's ministry. Then I remembered a sermon I preached years ago in which I said that if people outside the church won't come to our parties, we need to go to theirs. Even my own sermons were turning against me! Therefore, I discerned that the Lord was telling me, "Arise, go to the Halloween party." Therefore, I withdrew the regrets I had sent and instead accepted the invitation. Then a strange thing happened. I started looking forward to

the party. I started wondering what God was up to, and I was eager to find out. I went to Nineveh, uh, the Halloween party not grudgingly but expectantly.

In our house, we have a television but no cable and no reception, by choice, because we don't want to get sucked in to watching it. The party house, though, had a huge high-def television, and Game 4 of the World Series was on! Many of the party-goers gathered around to watch, and I was able to explain the intricacies of the game to those who were, shall we say, less initiated. Plus, the Giants came from behind, took the lead, and blew the game wide open! Oh, and also, I was able to tell part of my story, between innings and while the game was going on, to the woman who was sitting next to me on the couch.

Listen to the events of your life.

And that's the end of Jonah. The sailors throw him overboard, and he drowns in the sea. No? Well, that's what the sailors think. That's what Jonah thinks. That's what we think, at the end of verse 16. Oh, there's more? Something about a fish? Oh.

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## **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> *Hook*, TriStar Pictures (1991).

<sup>2</sup> The word translated "rose" in verse 3 is the same word that is translated "arise" in verse 2. The conjunction translated "But" at the beginning of verse 3 could equally be translated "And."

<sup>3</sup> Pink, "Sober" (LaFace, RCA, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Buechner, *God Speaking* (frederickbuechner.com.)

<sup>5</sup> I learned this from Brennan Manning.