

“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.” Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.” Jonah 3:1-3 (NIV)

Nineveh was a large city and full of people who were sinning against the Lord. The bible tells us that it was so large that it took 3 days to walk through it...however, I think from archaeological evidence that was a bit of an exaggeration (*pers comm.*), but the fact was that it was a place where sin was normal and obeying God’s commands was not. Jonah had been chosen. He was given the task of telling these people that what they were doing was upsetting to God and, unsurprisingly, fear gripped Jonah very firmly and he went in the opposite direction. God, however, still wanted Jonah to be the one that delivered the news and made sure that Jonah became obedient. Being in the belly of a large fish was probably somewhat more traumatising than heading to a city to say “ Hey, guys and gals. God says you’ve been sinning against Him and He wants you to repent.”

I know Jonah would not have said it like that, but being inside that fish made sure that Jonah had the time to really consider what was happening. Would it be worse to obey God and head to Nineveh and pass on the message, or be slowly digested by a fish? It’s unfortunate that Jonah had to be told a second time, and that it took a major incident for him to actually make the choice to do as God requested.

There are a few lessons here that we can carry forward into our daily lives. First of all God loves us enough to give us second chances (and often more than just second chances). It doesn’t matter if we muck up. God doesn’t give up on us because we give in to fear. We may feel guilty but often there will be other opportunities to make it right or things will work out according to God’s plan despite us getting terribly wrong.

Another thing we can take from the story of Jonah is that ultimately I don’t believe Jonah was unafraid when he finally went to deliver Gods message in the city. He did it despite being afraid. It may have been a lesser fear than being digested, but the fear was probably still there. Sometimes we have to be courageous and do things even if we feel fear try to overtake us. It isn’t easy. Doing anything when you are scared is difficult and sometimes if its something you need to do multiple times, getting a trusted friend or family member (if you have either) to assist you and show you its OK can help you get over the fear and help you on the road to independence in that area.

Finally, although we know of Jonah’s failings and his ultimate success in getting the city of Nineveh to repent, we have to remember that hearing from God isn’t always an easy thing. It’s something that we have to be open to for the most part. We don’t all get to hear the voice of God talking from a burning Bush, for example (see Exodus chapter 3).

Pray;

Lord of second chances, we know that we don’t deserve the may chances you give us to repent and come back to you. We fail time and time again. We try to run away out of fear just like you servant Jonah did, but we thank you that your forgiveness is free flowing and that just like Jonah, with your help we can do what you ask of us, regardless of the fear bottled up inside. Please help us to remember that you never ask your children to do something for which they are incapable with your help and let that give us the courage we need to continue to follow you through thick and thin. Amen.