

Jonah 1:1-4
Wind to Carry
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6-7-15

David and Kim Laufenburger are the Directors of Camp Ojibway in Siren, Wisconsin, and were enjoying a bit of down time following dinner. The dishes were being washed, the staff was preparing for evening vespers, and 54 second and third graders were out playing basketball, throwing the Frisbee, or huddling together with new friends, when the phone rang. It was Kim's father Rex: "I think you'd better get those kids indoors to safety now. You've got some weather headed your way." And not a moment too soon, no sooner than the staff corralled the children into the dry storage and equipment rooms in the walk out basement of the main lodge, did the windows blow out. So close was it, in fact, that they had to wedge towels at the bottom of the doors to keep the broken glass from blowing in.

On Monday, June 18th, 2001 a category F-3 Tornado bore down upon Camp Ojibway, peeling the roof off the main lodge, as well as entire cabins off their foundations. It tossed speed boats and wave runners out into the middle of the lake like they were skipping stones and made the pier look like the track of a roller coaster.

When it had all passed and the group began to emerge from the rubble, two things were apparent: 1. Miraculously, not a single human life was injured, not even a scratch; 2. Camp was gone. And so as they stood there in the eerie silence that followed, they were confronted with many, many questions, among them, "What does this mean?"

We are continuing a series of messages called Deep Breath. The Hebrew noun used to describe it is *ruach*. Over and over again, the Bible describes the Spirit as the breath or wind of God that moves throughout the world. And as we look to the Scriptures for an honest and authentic understanding of the Holy Spirit, we cannot avoid the fact that it moves in mysterious ways. It moves in unpredictable ways; in gentle, peaceful ways; and in chaotic, unpredictable ways. So when we say that to know the Holy Spirit is to know the Deep Breath of God, what we are saying is that we know vast myriad experiences both uplifting and also terrifying that enable us to look to the eye of the storm and know that Deep Breath.

And over the next few weeks, we will seek to answer this question: What are the tangible, observable ways we see Holy Spirit alive in our lives? Sometimes the Spirit blows through our lives like a summer wind, cooling and refreshing. Sometimes it steamrolls like an F-3 Tornado, leaving in its wake confusion and chaos. But what the Bible teaches is that even though the judgments of the Lord are unsearchable, and his ways inscrutable, the Good Shepherd is always close by keeping watch and leading his flock.

With that in mind, I want to invite you to turn with me in your Bibles, either the one you brought with you or the one in the pew rack in front of you, to Jonah chapter 1. And as you are able, I invite you to stand with me as we listen to the Word of the Lord.

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.” 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.

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.

Allow me to play a little word association game with you. I’ll say a word and you say the first word that comes to mind: Jonah...I’ll bet for many of you, the first word that came to mind when I said Jonah was whale. But in the first century, the association they would come up with would be very different, because the name Jonah in Hebrew means “dove.”

The book of Jonah is a fascinating one. Only four chapters in length, there is only one person in the entire book who is named, and that is Jonah. There are sailors, there are Ninevites, there is even a king. But only one is named, Jonah the Dove.

Think with me for a moment about how rich this image is, not just for us, but for Hebrews, as well. The dove was the animal Noah sent out over the watery chaos of the flood to look for the rescue of dry land. The dove in the temple courts was the most common sacrifice available for people to purchase for their offerings. In the New Testament, it is the dove that represents the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus in his baptism.

So Jonah the Dove is minding his own business when God comes to him with a job to do: Go and preach to the city of Nineveh, don’t just preach, but cry out against Nineveh for their wickedness. So what does Jonah do? Without word, he turns and goes down to the port city of Joppa and gets on a boat bound for Tarshish, to what would have been considered the outermost end of the world.

Now, you have to read Jonah with a sense of humor. I mean, it’s sort of like a Laurel and Hardy act or a Charlie Chaplin movie. God tells Jonah to go east, so what does he do? As soon as God’s done talking, he turns – without saying a word, mind you – and does exactly the opposite.

What I want to impress upon you this morning is that whenever the Holy Spirit comes and rests upon someone (or someones), an important call is never far away. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Saul of Tarsus, and Jesus of Nazareth all had an encounter where the Spirit of the Living God, the Word that was in the beginning, came upon them, and when He did, He gave them something important to do. For Isaiah, Jeremiah – it was a word of warning to the disobedient nation of Israel and the looming exile that they faced; for Ezekiel – a word of hope to a beat down, exiled Israel; for Paul – Apostle to the Gentiles; Jesus – Preach Good News to the poor, and proclaim the day of the Lord’s favor, the fulfillment of God’s covenanted promises to Israel and salvation of the world.

The Spirit comes so that God’s purposes can be carried out in and through you and me. But for Jonah, the Spirit had to do a bit more coaxing.

Like each of the others, Jonah is a Prophet, and a Prophet's job is to speak—only Jonah never does. What does Jonah say when God tells him to go to Nineveh? Nothing. He just turns tail and runs.

I love how John Ortberg, using the cadence of Dr. Seuss, describes Jonah's response:

I would not go there in a boat, I would not go there in a float.
I would not go there in a gale, I would not go there in a whale.
I do not like the people there, if they all died I would not care.
I will not go to that great town, I'd rather choke, I'd rather drown.
I will not go by land or sea, so stop this talk and let me be.

But to be fair to Jonah, God did give him a really hard assignment. Nineveh was the center of all that was opposed to Israel. It would be like God sending a Jew into Berlin in the 1930s or a Christian into Iran or North Korea to preach to them. This was the belly of the beast. Nineveh was so destructive that it was nicknamed the city of blood because of its tyrannical and unconscionably violent conquests of rival nations. So you can see why Jonah was like vapor trail when God says, "Hey, J, I've got a job for you."

So Jonah, the text says, goes down to Joppa and boards a boat for Tarshish, the complete opposite of Nineveh. Nineveh was the bloodthirsty seat of the Assyrian Empire, Tarshish was Palm Springs. Tarshish was Jonah's idea of what it looked like for him to serve God. Nineveh, on the other hand, just is not in his skill set.

As Eugene Peterson reminds us, if you are not certain what God wants you to be doing with your life, don't start by shopping for good places to volunteer because you will never pick Nineveh. And do not rush to the Bible for clues if you are only thinking of it as a catalogue in which mission opportunities are marketed. We sometimes manipulate the Bible into being an answer book where we go when we have questions. But that is not why the Bible was written. As the Word of God, it is the Bible that asks questions of us and waits for a response: "Do you want to use your life for something that makes an eternity of a difference?" When we begin with our own questions, questions like "Where should I go?" the answer is always Tarshish.

When God comes into your life and places a call upon you, it doesn't always look the way you think it will. It may begin when something unexpected happens. It may begin when what you thought was going to happen in your life, like marriage, or kids, or a comfortable job with retirement promises, doesn't actually come to fruition. It may come when the plan you thought was air-tight, without warning, springs an irreparable leak.

In fact, most of the time it comes about the time when we think we've figured it all out. It comes when we've settled into that very comfortable, and oh-so-familiar groove called self-reliance or complacency.

And it may not even be a bad groove, it may be a very well-intentioned, good enough groove. You may have done your Myers Briggs and Spiritual Gifts inventory, you may have sought out the program that best suits your giftings, and the community where it

will have the greatest impact. Now you're ready to go and start being useful to God. But that doesn't mean its God's groove.

God has a way of sending His Spirit into our plans, and when he does it's not always with that still small "Mr. Rodgers" voice. No, sometimes—in fact, often—the Holy Spirit practically capsizes our plans with the wind and waves of His Spirit. You remember Pentecost Sunday a few weeks ago, how the disciples were huddled together trying to come up with their plan when the Spirit came upon them and sling-shot them from their board room out into the streets where their ministry was waiting. For Jonah, it was a great storm at sea that finally got his attention.

Whether you are faced with something that you're desperately trying to avoid, quietly boarding your ship for Tarshish, trying to fly below the radar; or whether you and God are having it out with one another, know that the Holy Spirit is there. The Spirit is there in calm waters, the Spirit is there in the storms. The wind of the Spirit is carrying you, it is carrying us to where the Spirit will use us. The question is, how will it get your attention? Are you moving in the current with the Holy Spirit, or does it feel like you are constantly paddling upstream, facing one storm after another? If it's the latter, perhaps God is trying to get your attention.

A few weeks before the beginning of the 2001 Camp Season, Directors David and Kim Laufenburger were standing in the middle of the ball field across the road from Camp Ojibway surrounded by acres and acres of wooded land loaded with potential. They were discussing plans with a contractor for a high ropes course. During the meeting, a snarky comment was made, "It would take a tornado to change the course of our planning."

And God said, "Well ok. If that's what it takes for you to remember that this is my ministry not yours."

You see, we had gotten really good at doing Camp Ministry, we found our groove. But the problem with grooves is the more we remain in them, the deeper they get and the more difficult they are to change course. Grooves limit our mobility as well as our ability to adapt and be transformed. Grooves are what happen when we call the shots. Maybe what God had in mind for Camp Ojibway, and all who love it, was total surrender and a renewal of our trust in the God who calls. Even if it meant the very thing we love is taken from us, if that's what it takes for us to trust the creator not the creation. **The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.**

In the months that followed, David and Kim, the staff and the entire congregation recommitted their lives to prayer for God's leading and direction. What did God have in store for CO: rebuild, relocate, or retire all together? The Spirit had swept them up and brought them to the place of total dependence and trust in God's vision for this ministry. It even meant two years of wilderness exile taking Camp Ojibway on the road, tabernacle-ing, as it were.

Then after two summers of prayer, waiting and discerning God's leading, a new property came before them. It was a larger, more suitable environment for broadening and enhancing the ministry to children and families of all walks of life. Rice Lake, in Eden Valley, Minnesota, is their new home. And though it took a devastating wind to get there, the gentle, cool, renewing, and transformative wind of the Gospel continues to blow through Camp Ojibway still, only now—more than ever—“do we know that it is God who draws us.”

You see, it was God who, when we turned our backs, or turned tail and ran, turned and pursued us, chasing us down and bringing us back. Even if it took an event as awe-inspiring as a tornado, or as whopping as a whale's belly, to remind us who really is in control. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 18, “The ways of the Lord are perfect, and refreshing to the soul.”