

Jonah Was Right – January 24, 2021

It is hard to admit when I am wrong. When something I am so sure is right turns out to be wrong, then admitting that I am wrong is so difficult. Either I am feeling like I am a constant screw up or so certain of my righteousness that I bore everyone with it. I think there are many of us who rove from these two poles. It is why one of my favorite clichés is, “You are not as bad as you think you are, but you are not as good as you think you are either.”

Your manse is a wonderful beast of a home. If I count the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor rooms there are 6 bedrooms. It is all wood floor with many draft points. I attempt to use as few rooms as possible so that means I have less of a chance of being a slob in them. The boiler was replaced recently so the heat is consistent. Last winter the boiler had some issues. What I am trying to say is just like any property owned by a church there are things that your session has to take into account, like upkeep, lawn care, and utilities.

One thing you easily realize as a pastor in a manse is that you are not living in a rental, but you do not own anything. There is no equity in a home, but it is not a landlord situation either. It is another one of those strange situations that exist in the “Church” world.

Don't get me wrong. I have enjoyed my time in the manse, but I do not consider it home. Home is where my family resides. This is a place I sleep until I can be with my family again. It can be a lonely place, but also a place I have enjoy retreating.

So, why am I bringing up the manse? Most people in the church rarely think about this building. It is because I have particular experiences that many pastors have missed in their ministry profiles. When the kitchen sink is clogged I do not call a plumber, I take apart the pipes and snake them. When there is a hornets nest I do not call the property committee, I spray it. When I had a bat flying in the main hall I shooed it out. When the boiler needed refilling with water to get heat I just did it.

Why? Because I have run buildings. When I started Mercy Junction Justice and Peace Center I oversaw 164,000 square feet of building. We had 30 tenants. I did all the advertising, measuring of rooms, changing locks, blowing down the boiler, dealing with a flea infestation, unclogging toilets, collecting rent, making sure heat registers worked, settling disputes, and mopping the floors.

A local reporter who supported my minister once asked, "Why are you mopping? You are the pastor!"

I replied, "If I don't do it who will do this work?"

The problem with having this type of experience is that it makes me think that I have more insight into building problems than might actually be reality.

A case in point is the upstairs bathroom of the manse. I fixed the toilet and its slow flow. This gave me a sense of confidence. So, when the shower drain began to clog, I was on the case. The chilly standing water was no challenge to someone like me, right? I knew just what to do.

I took out the snake I had purchased at the hardware store and when it did not go very far down the pipe, I was unbowed. It must be quite a clog. I tried the snake again, again, and again.

I bought the dreaded draino (I felt I was cheating). This only made the cold standing water filled with toxic chemicals. So, I took a pot from the kitchen and carefully bailed the water out of the tub.

For a few days I showered and bailed the water, showered and bailed the water. I did this until I regained my confidence to solve this clogged pipe. I was sure it was because the pipes were old. I attempted to follow the pipes

into the basement. I banged on them, acting like this was some sort of diagnosis of the problem.

Then I saw the plunger near the toilet.

Oh boy, did I plunge that drain. It seemed if I plunged quite vigorously, I could get the drain to work slowly. Every morning, after a shower I would plunge, plunge and plunge. I was even late for work a day or two trying to get this drain to slowly empty the tub of water.

When sometimes my plunging did not work, I would return to bailing the water into the sink. So, I was plunging, bailing, plunging, bailing.

I got so frustrated. I probably said a few words that would have made a sailor blush. I would not give up. This had gone on for months. I was stubborn, I was not going to let a clog win. That was when the plunging quit working.

I had complained to Diane, I am sure I had complained to Al Ravo, there may have been others I complained to. I am sure there was the offer of a plumber looking at it, but I was not going to be defeated by a simple clogged drain.

There was going to be one more epic battle of Brian Vs. The Bathroom clog. It would be epic. I was determined not to

win. Snake, bail, plunge were all part of the battle. I remember going into a plunging frenzy like I have never done before. Water was everywhere, I was soaking wet and angry at this inanimate clog, like it was the devil itself.

That was when my rag I had draped over the facet fell and I saw something that made me laugh uncontrollably. It was the lever that would release the stopper in the pipe and drain the water. Somehow, over time it had switched to the shut position. As I flipped it water swirled, and the tub instantly emptied of water.

I was completely correct, all that time, the drain was clogged. It was clogged by the stopper that was built to stop water for a bath. I felt stupid, but more so relieved that the plumber had not been called.

Jonah is right. Nineveh is wicked. They should be destroyed. God is too soft. Nineveh is wicked because they are completely immoral. They do not know their left hand from their right hand. Jonah knows that God will forgive people. God will be too liberal in the area of grace and mercy. It is the principle of the thing. How will Yahweh make Israel great again if God ignores the enemies of the nation. Worst, God will probably save them.

Jonah is so much like me. It is my favorite book of the Hebrew Tannak. If I am responsible for God's salvation heaven will be a terribly lonely place. It is not only that I cannot live up to my own spiritual and ethical expectations of others. It is also, that I make an industry out of petty resentments.

In my mind if you have wronged me I work and work and work through prayer to come to a place where I love you. I would rather live by the line in the Phil Collins song, "In the Air Tonight" when he says, "If I saw you were drowning, I would not lend a hand."

Yet, like Jonah, I know that this is not the mind of God. God is always slow to anger. God is always more willing to show grace and mercy than I am. God is so annoying.

It seems that our society has made a financial killing off of division. It may equal an addition to someone's bottom line, but it does not add up to God's view of humanity. Angry because of civics or having the right views of how a church should function that are often elevated to a divine status. We are so right in our politics that we might be sure we know how to drain the clog.

When we elevate anything outside of the divine to divine status that is danger. It is idolatry. Only God is God. I am not God, nor am I qualified to represent God as an authority.

Humility means we might know with the certainty of Job that we are right and also realize we do not have God's perspective. We are mere shards of the beautiful prism shining inside creation. We are part of something that is so much greater than us.

God is using people I despise, this I know. How? Because, I know that there are people who despise me and I know God wants to use me.

Love your neighbor, even if they are despicable to you. God's view of them is not limited to your perspective. This is the lesson of Jonah, the lesson of being right and also being so wrong.

Thanks be to God.