

**September 24, 2017 – Annunciation Episcopal Church – 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

**Shay Craig**

Proper 20 A

How many of us know the name of Lt Adrian Marks?

On July 30, 1945 the USS Indianapolis, a heavy cruiser and the flagship of the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet of the United States Navy, was on its way to one of the Marianas Islands.

At fifteen minutes after midnight, it was struck by two torpedoes. It took 14 minutes to sink. It had a full complement of 1198 sailors on board.

Of that 1198, 900 sailors survived the initial sinking of the ship.

But it was the middle of the night in the middle of the Pacific and the ship had gone down so fast that it had not sent a distress signal and the US Navy was not aware that it had been sunk.

900 men were left floating for 3 days in the open sea.

If you have ever seen the movie *Jaws*, you know that what followed was the largest shark attack in US Naval history.

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, three days later, a routine patrol flight discovered the 380 men floating in the water and alerted the Navy which initiated a rescue operation.

A PBY Catalina – it's called a Dumbo because it has these big floppy looking wings – was sent to fly over the survivors, to drop rafts and to reconnoiter and report back on their status.

Now a Catalina is an airplane built for just this purpose: to reconnoiter and to drop rescue supplies. It is not built to land on the open sea.

The Captain of that Cataline, Lt. R. Adrian Marks, was under direct orders not to land, just to drop rafts and report back.

But when he and his crew flew over the area they saw 317 men bobbing in the shark infested water.

317 men.

He was carrying three rafts. He and his crew knew

- 1) that it was going to be many hours before the next rescue vessel arrived, and

2) that the three rafts they dropped – one of which busted up when it hit the water- were not enough.

So, in defiance of direct orders, LT Marks, returned to the site and set down his plan and set about rescuing survivors.

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Our Old Testament scripture has a maritime story of an entirely different nature. The Book of Jonah.

I love Jonah, and not just because it was the subject of the first feature length Veggie Tales movie, though that is a plus (“we are the pirates, who don’t do anything...)

I love the book of Jonah because Jonah is the best prophet of God of all time. Period.

If you have not read it, you should, its four chapters, two pages. And wonderful.

Let’s review:

The Message version opens like this:

*One day long ago, GOD’s Word came to Jonah, Amittai’s son: “Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They’re in a bad way and I can’t ignore it any longer. But Jonah got up and went the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God. ”*

You already love it, don’t you?

God says “go to Nineveh” and Jonah hops a boat to Tarshish!

Now, the ship on which Jonah is sailing, is crewed by people who worship other gods.

So, God, send a huge storm, that threatens to sink the ship.

The ship is being tossed all around and the sailors are throwing things over the sides in an effort to stay afloat and they are praying and pleading with their Gods....

And Jonah, the best prophet of all time, is in the hold of the ship, fast asleep.

So, one thing leads to another, the sailors learn that Jonah is a prophet of the God of the Hebrews, you know, the God who made all of heaven and earth, and that he is running away from God!

And they say, “Hey, hi, YHWH, God of the Hebrews! Clearly this Jonah guy has got on your bad side but don’t punish us! Here, you can have him back just please save our lives!”

And they throw Jonah overboard.

And the sea is instantly stilled.

And ...

*16 The sailors were impressed, no longer terrified by the sea, but in awe of GOD. They worshiped GOD, offered a sacrifice, and made vows.*

Jonah, the best prophet of all time, has converted an entire ship of sailors, while napping in the hold.

Now this is the part where we get to Jonah in the belly of the big fish.

While he is in the water, he is swallowed by a big fish and is in the belly of the fish three days.

He prays to God, and then the big fish spits him out onto the shore. I say “spit” but the Hebrew here is specific, he, um, (gesture) you know.

So... God sends him on to Nineveh again and this time he actually goes.

Now, Nineveh is this enormous city. It says in the Bible that it takes three days to walk across it.

Jonah, the best prophet of all time, walks into the gates, goes about a third of the way in – one day’s walk - and says, “*In forty days Nineveh will be smashed.*”

Then Jonah splits.

He goes to a hillside overlooking Nineveh to watch the fireworks when God brings down his wrath on the City.

And you know what happens?

The city's leaders hear Jonah's words.  
 And they call on the whole city to repent.  
 They all begin to fast, they put on burlap clothes and sit in the dirt to show  
 their repentance and pray to God.  
 And by "all" I mean including their animals: "herds and flocks" it says.  
 So imagine this:

an entire huge city,  
 every man woman child,  
 horse, cow and donkey,  
 wearing burlap, sitting in the dirt, praying for mercy.

Jonah walked a little way into town,  
 basically whispered the message from God,  
 then zoomed out to wait on a hill to see God smash the joint into dust...

And he converted the whole city. And their little dogs, too.

Best. Prophet. Of. All. Time.

Jonah is not even really trying to do Gods' work,  
 in fact he is actively avoiding it –  
 and he manages to convert everyone he comes into contact with.

Which begs the question: *what could he do if he really applied himself?*

The book of Jonah asks us two very hard questions.

The first is, what could you do if you gave it your all?

What could you accomplish in the service of God if you actually tried?  
 Jonah gave it just about as halfhearted a try as you can imagine and he  
 converted EVERYONE he came in contact with.

It's a big world and God is a big God. What could you do if you really stretched  
 yourself?

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Look, we are not a "going to Tarshish" congregation. When we are called by  
 God, we answer with a resounding "YES!"

Since I've been here – in just the few months that I have been here

- We collected over [\\$3000](#) in gift cards and 2 car loads of gifts for Cory's Project.
- On Super Bowl Sunday, we brought in 125 cans of soup for people who are food insecure
- We gathered up 1000 pairs of socks for Sock It To Me Sunday- that's two thousand feet!
- And raised [\\$660.40](#) to support our ASP travelers.  
(and that's just the stuff Sue is keeping track of!)

That is very impressive.

We are coming into pledge season here at Annunciation.

And it seems to me that the question raised by Jonah should be in our minds when our pledge cards come in the mail.

So many of us fill out our pledge cards without thinking,  
we just write in the number we wrote last year,  
or the number that would be easy to meet.

Are we like Jonah sleeping in the hold of the ship?

Or “whispering” when God commanded us to yell at the top of our voices?

But what could we do if we really applied ourselves?

What could we do if we stretched?

What could we achieve if we all increased our pledges by 3%?

What could we achieve if we really gave it our best effort.

We are already so impactful, so vibrant and generous...

What could we do if we really stretched?

Dream Big – God a Big God.

So, remember I said the book of Jonah asks us two questions.

The first one is: what could we do if we really tried.

The second one comes at the end of the book.

I'd like to read it to you if I may:

*GOD said, "What's this? How is it that you can change your feelings from pleasure to anger overnight about a mere shade tree that you did nothing to get? You neither planted nor watered it. It grew up one night and died the next night. So, why can't I likewise change what I feel about Nineveh from*

*anger to pleasure, this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don't yet know right from wrong, to say nothing of all the innocent animals?"*

God is saying to Jonah: Are you going to be guided by your priorities, or God's?

LT Adrian Marks was ordered to fly over the survivors of the Indianapolis. He was told to drop three boats and some drinking water.

Those were his orders and he was an officer and a Naval Airman.

But he took one look at those heads bobbing the water and he knew what God's priorities were.

And he landed his plane – in 15 foot swells – and picked up all the passengers he could get into his hold and when the plane was full, he pulled survivors onto the wings and lashed them there – effectively destroying the ship.

He defied a direct order.

He did more than he was called on to do – in “actually applying himself” he saved 56 men – one sixth of all the survivors of the tragedy of the Indianapolis.

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Here is the question that God is asking Jonah – that God is asking us.

Are we going to be concerned about the tree or the people?

Are we going to worry about our orders or the men in the water?

Are we going to be guided by our priorities or by God's priorities?

And here's an interesting thing. The book ends on a question mark.

God is still waiting to hear our response.