

Mid-Course Corrections

“The Transformation”

3-13-11

There are some people who drift into our lives, who have profound affect on us. Whether we know it at that moment or not, there are words they say, or episodes that happen surrounding them, that are forever etched in our memories that change us from then on,. In my life one of those people was Uncle George. (Story: about fishing with Uncle George)

Last week we started this series called mid-Course Corrections and we followed the episode in the life of Jonah that got him off course and ultimately right where we find him this morning, in the belly of a large fish. Now you will quickly learn about me that I believe these Old Testament stories are real events that took place in our history but they are also pictures and illustrations that God wants us to see that reveal truth to us that God wants us to see and meditate on.

So think about Jonah again with me today, what do we know so far from chapter 1,(ask people from congregation)

1. Jonah heard God’s voice but would have none of it
2. Got on a ship and headed in the exact opposite direction from the direction God was calling him to go.
3. He encountered a storm along with everyone else on the ship.
4. The crew got busy trying to save the ship while Jonah was below deck sleeping
5. The Captain found him, woke him up and told him to call on his God
6. He ends up on deck with the rest of the crew.
7. Jonah comes clean that he is running away from God
8. Then the crew throws him overboard

Which brings us to today.

When a person is off course in their life they can go a ways without having to pay the piper, so to speak. Sometimes they can go a long time, but sooner or later, the mask they have been wearing falls off, the life they have been leading comes to a dead-end and it is time to change or die.

Jonah is at that moment:

When it’s Time to Transform

Scripture says:

“Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish,” Jonah 2:1

All of chapter 2 in the book of Jonah is about a man who has come to the end. He is sinking to and hitting rock bottom.

In the course of hitting bottom we have a choice. We have had a choice all along, but now the choice is ringing in our ears so loudly that it drowns out everything else. We are in the Deep and we can either die or we can learn. Jonah decided to learn. And I want to glean today from this chapter some of the truths that are exposed from his situation.

Learnings from the Deep

1. God wants our Anguish.

“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress...” Jonah 2:2

In his book, “How the Mighty Fall” Jim Collins speaks about how successful teams, groups or organizations lose the edge and begin a descent from a place of strength.

He traces 8 characteristics

1. Fearful of criticism, people shield those in power from grim facts
2. People begin to assert strong opinions without providing evidence or solid data.
3. Leaders avoid critical input, and allow unsupported opinions that fit their preferences
4. People submit to decisions that they are not really unified around.
5. People begin to seek as much credit for themselves as possible, but do not have the admiration of their peers.
6. People begin to argue, to look smart or to improve their own interests
7. People conduct “autopsies with blame” seeking culprits rather than wisdom
8. People fail to deliver exceptional results and begin to blame others or outside factors as the reason.

All along the way of this downward spiral Collins says people can pull out of it. All along the way we can reverse this trend, anytime we want to.

In essence, he asserts in his book, we need to call it out. We need to stop, pull away from the situation and recognize the thing we are doing to contribute to the downward spiral.

The organizations, people or groups that don't stop the downward tailspin, are the ones who fold their arms and say “It's not me, somebody else better get their act together, before it is too late.”

What we see in Jonah is a man who has come to this point where he is calling out. He is giving his distress to the only one who can reshape the entire picture.

The first learning we must see from this journey into the deep with Jonah is that God wants our anguish.

Far too often we have this out of balance. We, without sometimes knowing it, cast all our cares on unsuspecting people.

2. God is in Control of it All.

“For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.” Jonah 2:3

The next learning from the deep that we see here is that when we lose perspective on how big we are and how big God is, in his mercy he will remind us that his control is over everything.

From the shift in the economy that will cause a wholesale buyer half way around the world to say YES, that will result in some of you having steady work and income for the next year; to the harsh or helpful words you will say to your sons and daughters at lunch this afternoon. God is in control of it all. **(Blow this out with a short illustration)**

Which leads us to the 3rd learning:

3. Re-focusing on God is Our Choice.

“Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’” Jonah 2:4

*“When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.”
Jonah 2:7*

I want us to see the personal choice that is etched in these 2 verses. We can never forget that God limited himself. God set a boundary up for himself. He would not violate our free will. If we were going to be in relationship with him, we would have to choose it. If you are sitting here and your gut is all in knots about a particular issue in your life. You are the one who can do something about that.

Jonah’s words hit home don’t they; *‘I am driven away from your sight;* and *“When my life was fainting away,* He is pulling no punches here. Have you ever heard yourself say similar words;

1. “I’m done with this”
2. “I cannot take this another minute”
3. “My life is out of control, if things don’t change, I don’t know what I am going to do”

What the book of Jonah is saying here is, these moments are real, they don’t necessarily go away with a quick, “I’ll pray for you.” Solution.

There must emerge in the midst of the despair, in the midst of the darkness, a desire on our part to reconnect to God and God’s purposes, and we must choose, God, over these rotten stinkin circumstances.

When we do that, everything begins to change. God gets in there and begins to reshape our thinking. What does Romans 12:2 say, *“Do not be conformed any longer to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*

Transformation begins to happen the moment you choose to re-focus on God and immediately the 4th learning begins to happen:

4. We Gain a View of What Really Matters.

“Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.” Jonah 2:8

So what does this word **vain idols** mean? It means “nothingness, emptiness, anything that disappoints the hope that rests upon it.”

And the phrase, **“hope of steadfast love”** means “an act of kindness, love or mercy shown to someone.”

One of the stories that has always drawn a vivid picture for me of how God gets our attention as to what really matters is (story: [Newton family vacation on the North Shore of Hawaii](#))

5. My Words and my Actions must Match.

*“But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.” Jonah 2:9a*

Jonah comes to this last verse and he gets it. He realizes that living life saying one thing and doing another does not cut it with God or in this world that God created.

I believe this is why, so often the world looks at the church and says “Thanks but no thanks”. Because they do not see the words coming out of our mouths and our lifestyle behaviors matching up.

I shared earlier the 8 characteristics of the downward spiral, Likewise, Collins shares 8 characteristics of organizations, people or groups who are on their way up. Who have given their anguish to him and are ready to resurface and begin again.

1. People bring forth unpleasant facts to be discussed, leaders never criticize those who point out harsh realities.
2. People bring data and evidence to be discussed.
3. The leader asks questions, challenging people and pushing for penetrating insight
4. People, once they feel heard, unify behind a decision and work to help it succeed
5. Each person credits other people for success and still has the admiration of their peers
6. People argue and debate to find the best answers to support the overall cause.
7. People conduct, “Autopsies without blame” mining wisdom from painful experiences
8. People deliver exceptional results, yet in the event of a setback, each accepts full responsibility and learns from the mistake

Jonah was basically saying, “Alright, I have said I want to live for you and follow you, I am going to do it. And, I believe at the depth of his soul, he felt the salvation of God all over again.

“Salvation belongs to the Lord!” Jonah 2:9b

So, maybe like those fish, that Uncle George asked me to let go, you have felt caught. Maybe you have pulled and pulled until you have just stopped pulling to get free. Here is what the transformation process is telling us. God has set you free. Whatever, has happened in the last weeks months or years is God’s way of stirring the water, to remind you that in Christ you are free.

During this Lenten Series we are looking at our lives. In order to gain as much as possible out of this series of messages your best bet would be to cast your anguish upon God, and say. “I want to get on with life and what really matters, so all this junk, I give to you and I am ready to hear you loud and clear as to what you want to do with my life.

Let’s pray