

"Unfolding Light"

Based on Steve Garnaas-Holmes *Unfolding Light* (www.unfoldinglight.net)

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Text: The book of Jonah

The other morning, I was struggling with an opening to this ~~service~~ ^{message}. A good friend suggested, "why not open with a Jonah joke!"

What an idea! So, I googled Jonah jokes and came up with this beauty:

God asked Jonah what he was doing traveling inside a whale.

"Nineveh business, God "

Perhaps a better option would have been to open with selections from a musical we did way back when I was a kid. [Singing] "Get up and go to Nineveh", "Turn back, turn back to God". All I really want to do in this opening is to loosen you up a bit about this book of the Bible. It is a book about a man for whom God had a mission that the man was afraid to complete. There's much in this story that we have just heard, but I hope you looked at it from a humorous angle.

Building on the work of Steve Garnaas-Holmes, and his website “unfolding light.com”, I was led to share with you some of the questions this book contains for all of us.

The first statement he makes is that “life is more a comedy than a tragedy. Lighten up”. Think about that for just a little while. Looking back at your life, I know you’ll find many stories of how things did not go well: divorce, abandonment, financial struggles, and other traumatic events. But I also hope you’ll notice, when you think about it, that some events were rather funny, and in fact, maybe many of them? Life has a funny way of going off in directions that we did not plan. I was going to be a Russian language interpreter in the State Department or the United Nations. I find it hilarious where I ended up instead.

Cindy and I and our meeting, first dates, and miscommunications. They led where I’d hoped they would, in marriage, but along the way there were many funny things that occurred that seemed quite serious at the time, but upon reflection (and a few years) are pretty funny.

I know it’s hard to lighten up with all that is occurring in the world, but I have noticed that many of you have loved this sermon series theme. You have played with Legos, you have sung new songs, you have been entranced learning about

musical chords. And most of all, you have seen those who have led so far be their authentic selves. That is the goal of this theme. We all do need to lighten up a bit. Not abandon responsibilities forever, but take a break from time to time.

Garnaas-Holmes goes on with other statements for you to think about:

As dangerous as God is, the greatest risk is in trying to be safe.

Ever watch somebody on slippery ice trying hard not to fall down?

God is gravity. It's almost always funny when we try to resist it.

Your best friends won't throw you under the bus, but they will throw you
overboard.

When a big fish swallows you, don't worry. Sooner or later, it'll barf.

One thing that makes it hard for people to repent is that we expect them not to.

When saints judge people they trade places with the sinners.

Ever notice how often we're mad because God isn't?

Nothing can overwhelm love, but even a worm can upset pride.

It's OK to read the Bible and laugh. Just remember:

God always gets the last laugh. And it's pretty funny.

The one I want to spend a little more time on this morning is this one: The storms in our life are not a test. But they might be a question. People argue all the time about whether or not God is testing us. I believe fundamentally to the depths of my soul that God does not test us. Why would you have to test somebody you already know intimately? The Bible states explicitly over and over again that God knows us, inside and out, upside and down, in our thoughts, in our hearts, and even in our souls. If God doesn't know us, then no one can. In fact, I believe it far truer that the ones who do not know us are us. I know that's not proper English, but you get the idea.

The idea that suffering in our life might be a part of asking and answering questions can be mind-blowing for some. Suffering is a reality, and no one escapes it. God does not cause it, but uses everything, including our struggles, to help us become our true selves. Sometimes in the depths of despair and hurt, we find out who we really are, and what we are called to do. Garnaas-Holmes lifted up something I've never seen before in all my studies of the book of Jonah.

It's in the belly of the whale that Jonah comes to himself. Garnaas-Holmes says it this way: "In the middle of a raucous slapstick tale, Jonah, at the bottom of the sea, prays a beautiful prayer. Turns out the belly of a whale is a great place for

contemplation. Seriously.” Jonah finds himself in the belly of a whale. The tormented seas above no longer affect him. He can’t run away from who he is. There is no one else to blame, or to send in his place. There is only him and God, together, in the whale. I would love for you to consider that sometimes we must bottom out, be barfed up, clean ourselves off, and start down the road to which we are called.

More importantly, while we’re in the belly of the whale, we are clearly not alone.

This is a funny story, if you think about it. The likelihood it actually happened that way is low, but look at the power of metaphor, even humor, to help us see a reality we often ignore. God is with us always, and never gives up on us. God uses what we encounter not as a test, but as a question that we must someday answer.

The book of Jonah can be a powerful book, that is also powerfully funny. Play can be powerful, and it, too, can be powerfully funny.

Amen and amen.

