

The Descent into Transformation
Communion Sunday
Pastor Morgan Murray
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Text: Matt 12:38-50 NIV

38 Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.”

39 He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. 42 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

43 “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. 44 Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

46 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. 47 Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

48 He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

SERMON

At the end of March, we observed a significant local holiday. I wonder if you celebrated it? It was Apple’s big March Presentation. New movies, new Apple TV subscriptions offerings, even a new credit card! What surprises me, though, is how the introduction of the new products and services is no longer “news” in and of itself. It’s expected. We are addicted to our ideas, and not idea is more addicting than the idea that we need more, we need better, and we need different.

Pharisees want a sign. They doing something spectacular and great to prove Jesus is from God, and, should be listened to.

Greatness has been a theme throughout chapter 12. Here Jesus says: One greater than Jonah is here. One greater than Solomon is here. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus said, “something greater than the Temple, the Law, and the Tradition is here.”

What is this great thing? It is the coming Kingdom. It is THE CHANGE the changes everything.

But the Pharisees don't see it, because Jesus' type of greatness doesn't look great to them, or to us.

When Jesus wants to talk change and transformation, he turns to the story of Jonah. It is his primary metaphor for transformation – see also Matthew 16:4 and Luke 11:29. As a Jew, Jesus knew the vivid story of Jonah.

Before things get better, they have to fall apart. This is the pattern, woven into the very fabric of creation.

God had something in mind that was far greater than Jonah could have imagined – the salvation of entire city.

Jesus has something in mind that is far greater than the Pharisee can imagine – the salvation of everything.

Jonah was the prophet who ran away from God, was used by God in spite of himself. Jonah is an important story—then and now—because Jonah was basically a racist. He was all about treating the Ninevites as “those people” and wanting God to only bless “us.”

Jonah was swallowed by a “big fish” and taken where he would rather not go—a metaphor for any kind of death.

Jonah resisted, but God accomplished his loving, saving purposes anyway.

The Pharisees resisted, but Jesus descend into death and save everything anyway.

But Jesus didn't resist. He embraced this path. He embraced the pattern so that, in following Jesus, we must embrace it too.

Like Jonah and the Pharisees, we don't go willingly. God directs us to something greater, but

we don't want to go. It means giving up our little kingdoms. We cannot pray "Your kingdom come" and mean it without also wordlessly including, "... and my kingdom go."

Instead of following the pattern, we work to avoid it. We try to fix the problem ourselves through human effort and dutiful religion. But Jesus says that is like a man who may be able to get rid of one evil spirit and clean up the mess, but apart from God's transforming power will only be vulnerable to even greater suffering. When we try to avoid the path of descent, pursuing "onward and upward" religion, we inevitably end up worse off than when we'd started.

We must go into the belly of the beast. Then and only then will we be spit up on a new shore in spite of ourselves. Isn't this the story of most of our lives?

This is the Eucharistic mystery. That Christ's suffering, death, and descent is the way to New Life. It is repeated in nature over and over, yet we still resist it. We don't want things to fall apart and we do anything and everything we can to keep it from happening.

We can't hold EVERYTHING. So Jesus gives us something to hold: Himself, in the form of bread and cup.

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