

Let us pray... God of wonder, you are holy. Create a space for holiness in our lives. Usher your Spirit in our midst. Inspire and transform us. May we find compassion, and may we brave to share your grace and mercy... Amen.

The other day I went shopping for my granny...

Before I left, we went through her list, and I was familiar with most of the things except some cookies that my mom had gotten her on a previous shopping trip.

Thankfully she still had some left, so she showed me the package. They were Tate's cookies, pumpkin spice flavor, and came in an orange bag.

Once I was at the grocery store, I walked up and down the cookie aisle and couldn't find them... But instead of giving up, I asked a worker who was stocking the cookie aisle.

And it just so happened that right where I asked him, quite literally in front of me, were the many flavors of Tate's cookies.

I immediately thanked him and laughed at myself, explaining that I was looking for an orange bag, but all of these were green...

Now this isn't the only time I have missed something right in front of me, and it probably won't be the last...

But so often what we miss right in front of us are not actual things... Such as cookies, one's glasses, a cell phone, or car keys.

So often what we miss is life being lived out...

And so often we miss where God is calling us and we stumble around down our own path...

Because so often we misinterpret the word of God. We take things literally when we shouldn't and we often miss the point.

Case in point, is the book of Jonah...

Because when most people hear Jonah, they automatically think of a man swallowed by a whale...

Well first off it wasn't a whale that appeared in Jonah, it was a large fish...

Second, this large fish is only mentioned in two sentences of the entire book!

And third, the entire book of Jonah is not meant to be taken literally, and is actually a work of comedy...

But somewhere along the lines we have lost our sense of humor and lost our ability to read Jonah how it was intended.

Jonah is meant to bring our attention to what is right in front of us... Especially when we are facing a mirror...

Because Jonah is a relatable character who uses humor to break down the walls we put up.

Pulling us in and creating an emotional connection that can inspire us into action...

By challenging us to see our shortcomings... By noticing what we get angry about and how we break down the world in front of us.

As we all experience this world, we know it can be a strange and crazy place. Where we feel the need to put up barriers and harbor division by holding grudges and staying away from "those" people...

The people we deem Ninevites, the people we hate, don't like, don't understand, or don't get along with.

By asking... Would you want to go to their house?

Well if your answer is no, you are not alone, because Jonah didn't want to go to "their house" either.

In fact, Jonah tries so hard to get out of it, he goes directly the wrong way, where he ends up on a boat with pagan sailors, when a terrible storm comes.

And instead of giving in and doing what God asks, he asks the pagan sailors to throw him off the boat, knowing this will stop the storm and hoping that he can die...

Talk about not wanting to do something.

And as Jonah sinks to his fantasized and dramatic death, God sends in...the famous giant fish...

Where the most practical thing would be for Jonah to ride the fish to safety, but instead, in the most ridiculous fashion he ends up being swallowed...

Only to later be spat up by the fish, pointed in the direction of Ninevah...

Now if you ask me, Jonah got the better end of this deal... As we all know, there were two ways out of that fish...

But is Jonah happy about these circumstances... No... But nonetheless he gets to Ninevah, a city so big it takes 3 days to walk through... And only at one point does he mumble his sermon.

A sermon so short it is only 5 Hebrew words... A sermon he doesn't want to say because he wants the city to get what they having coming to them.

So, what is this famously short sermon???

"Forty days more and Nineveh will be overturned."

That's it... No mention of mercy... No mention of repentance... No mention of grace or love... And no mention of God...

And what happens next? Ironically, every single person in this gigantic metropolis turns from their evil ways.

And not only that, the animals get in on it too! We are told that humans and animals covered themselves with sackcloth, and cried out mightily to God, repenting from their evil ways.

Now that is a ridiculous image, animals repenting...

But you know what, it works... God gives grace and mercy to Ninevah, and he does not destroy it...

And what does Jonah do? Jonah storms off pouting and cries out again in anger. Saying, I knew it! I knew it! I knew you were a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

But you know what God does... God sends some grace right back to Jonah, despite his anger, by growing a bush to shade him.

And then God sends a worm to eat the bush so that it withers away, along with a hot wind, and a scorching sun... Which makes Jonah angry all over again... Angry enough to die...

To which God says is it right for you to be so angry? You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?

And the story ends... There is no response from Jonah... Which in turn invites us to respond and leaves us with a lot to think about...

What makes you angry? And is it right you are so angry, especially when it has to do with other people?

Jonah's story asks us to pay attention to what is right in front of us and how we choose to react...

And Jonah invites us to keep in mind how expansive God's grace and mercy is... Could it really be for everyone?

Even those people... Those whom we deem not worthy, like those workers from our gospel today, the ones who only worked a few hours and received a full day's pay.

Because so often we want people to get what we think they deserve... Instead of opening ourselves up to the deep pool of grace and mercy that lives in the waters of our baptism.

So often we miss what is right in front of us, because we are blinded by our anger or our own agendas.

And what is quite literally in front of many of us today, are quilts...

Quilts that have been made for all kinds of people... People with different beliefs, values, and lifestyles.

Quilts made with love. As they are symbols of God's unconditional grace and mercy that blankets all of creation. For God's love is stitched in us all... Amen.