

**Opening Scripture****Psalm 130****Opening Prayer****Scripture**

Jonah 2

**Message****By God's Grace**

For some Churches the last Sunday in October, the Sunday preceding All Saints Day or Halloween is observed at Reformation Sunday. It is the day that marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, on All Saints Day, a priest by the name of Martin Luther nailed a document to the door of the Church at Wittenburg in Germany, identifying corruption and false teaching that he saw in the Church. There were 95 points in that theses that he wrote. Luther had tried to bring his concerns to Church leaders but was ignored, so he took this drastic measure of writing his concerns down and posting them on the door of this Church. His efforts to bring about reform to the Church failed and a new movement known as the Protestant Reformation began. One of the concerns that Luther wrote about had to do with what the Church was teaching about how a person could experience salvation – or could come into a right relationship with God. The Church was teaching that people came into a right relationship with God through their own efforts. If they performed enough good works, if they contributed enough money to the Church they would be saved. Luther was never able to experience peace with God through his own efforts. But as Luther studied the Scriptures, particularly the books of Romans and Galatians, he came to understand that salvation was not something that we earned on our own, but was in fact a gift that God gives to people. It was as a result of **God's grace** that people were brought into right relationship with God, when they accepted His gift through faith.

***<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,***

**GRACE** became one of the themes of the Reformation. If you are familiar with the Bible you know that Grace is a word that is mentioned a lot in the Bible. That is what I want to talk about today.

Pastor Rick Warren tells a story about a lesson he learned when he worked one summer as a lifeguard. He writes that when a person is fearful that they are going to drown, they will kick their feet, and flail their arms trying to save themselves. If the lifeguard tries to rescue that person when they are frantically trying to save themselves, they will pull the lifeguard down with them. He says that an experienced lifeguard learns to wait until the person in danger gives up. The lifeguard can then put his or her arms around the person and bring them to safety. That is how we experience salvation – we give up trying to save ourselves and we let God rescue us.

The Bible Dictionary defines grace this way: ***Grace is the kindness of God to human beings. More specifically, Grace is used to express the concept of kindness given to someone who does not deserve it.***

There is a story in the Bible that beautifully illustrates the concept of **Grace**. It is recorded in the Old Testament in the little book of Jonah. Jonah was a prophet of Israel. One day he received a call from God to go and preach in a far away city - Nineveh. God said that the wickedness of Nineveh had risen up before Him. Nineveh was a chief city in the nation of Assyria. Assyria was the enemy of God's people Israel. They were enemy to a lot of other nations as well. Their reputation for violence and evil was unsurpassed. Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh and preach. Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah bought a ticket on a boat that was headed toward Spain, in the opposite direction from Nineveh. While he was on the sea a violent storm blew up. The book tells us that God was responsible for the storm. The storm was so violent that it threatened to

break the ship apart. The sailors were terrified. They were convinced that a god was responsible for the storm. They threw cargo overboard, they all cried out to their own god, but nothing helped. The storm got worse by the minute. Finally, Jonah recognized what was going on. He understood that God had sent the storm because of his disobedience. He convinced the sailors to throw him overboard, into the sea and the storm would stop. The sailors try to save the ship, but finally gave in and threw Jonah into the sea. Immediately the storm stopped and the sea became calm.

As Jonah hit the water, he became terrified, and of course feared for his life. He was about to drown, but God rescued him. God sent a great fish to swallow him and save him from drowning. As Jonah is about to drown, he apparently cried out to God in his heart. His prayer is recorded in chapter 2.

### **Read Jonah 2 (NIV).**

As Jonah is praying that prayer, **I wonder what reason he had to expect that God would listen to him or answer his plea for rescue.** After all, he disobeyed God. God told him to do something and he refused. As a matter of fact he ran in the opposite direction. Not only was he trying to avoid going to Nineveh, I believe he was trying to get away from God. Perhaps he thought that by leaving his homeland – Israel – he would be leaving God behind. But fortunately, for Jonah's sake, he discovered that God is everywhere. In the midst of the sea, as he is slowly descending in the waters toward his death. In that moment, **Jonah remembered his theology.** The people of Israel had learned some lessons about God. In Exodus 34, Moses asked God to reveal his character to him. Moses wanted to know what God was like. So God revealed Himself to Moses. **<sup>6</sup> And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.** The people of Israel and Jonah had learned that God was a God of **Grace**. I'm sure that Jonah was familiar with those words. So in his desperation, as he is about to drown, Jonah cried out to God, counting on God to forgive his rebellion and save him. And God did. He rescues Jonah in a rather strange way. He prepared a Big fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was able to survive inside the belly of the fish.

As Jonah prays, he shares an important insight in verse 8:

**<sup>8</sup> "Those who cling to worthless idols  
turn away from God's love for them.**

Jonah expresses a word of warning for those who look elsewhere for help. Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. The word here that is translated "Love" is the Hebrew word Heseb. Sometimes that word is translated "Lovingkindness". Sometimes it is translated "Grace". Those who do not look to YHWH, the God of the Israelites, forfeit the opportunity to experience God's grace, his mercy and his kindness. Jonah learned that the only one He could turn to was God.

As Jonah concludes his prayer from inside the belly of the fish he vows to be a different person.

***But I, with shouts of grateful praise,  
will sacrifice to you.  
What I have vowed I will make good.  
I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'***

Jonah's response to God's gracious rescue of him was worship and a commitment to honor and worship Him alone.

After 3 days, God caused the fish to vomit him on to dry land. Jonah's **Grace Lesson** – Even though we disobey, we disappoint God, He still loves us and longs to rescue us from our bad choices. No one is too bad for God to save. I remind you again of the definition of grace: ***Grace is used to express the concept of kindness given to someone who does not deserve it.***

**GRACE** – It is a wonderful concept. God’s mercy and kindness expressed to us, even when we don’t deserve it. We don’t have to work to earn God’s favor. We don’t have to build up points to get to a place where God owes us. God is prepared to extend His kindness to us no matter what. We respond to God in humility and worship because of His willingness to be kind to us, even when we don’t deserve it. NO ONE is beyond God’s Grace, not even you!

I hope that you are listening to the voice of Grace.

**Prayer Time**

**Benediction**