

## 9.20.20 L25P16 God's Concern

- Several years ago, when the Eagles were making a run for the Super Bowl, I was driving the car and listening to sports radio
  - And one of the people who called-in told us that she was sure that the Eagles were going to win, because she was sure – ABSOLUTLY SURE – that God had his on the Eagles
  - And with God's hand on them, God's destiny ensured that the Eagles were going to win
  - I'm sure that the woman who called was devout, and sincere, and a person of great and well-meaning faith, but all I could think of was, "Does God play football? Does God really take sides in a game? Aren't there more important things for God to care about than the Super Bowl?"
- Now let's raise the stakes and take a huge step up
  - Instead of football teams, what about nations?
  - Does God have God's hand on a particular nation?
  - Does God play favorites?
  - Sure, long ago God choose the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, but when they become a nation in the Hebrew scriptures they lost their way, and God had to choose time and time again to love them not because of themselves, but despite themselves
  - Frankly it's a far cry from ancient Israel to modern day Israel, and it a far cry from ancient chosen nation status to modern nations like England, or Germany, or even the United States – modern countries that at some time have all claimed to have had God's hand on their shoulders
  - And if you turn on the television to many religious shows, or listen to many of our brothers and sisters in some parts of the evangelical wing of the church of Jesus Christ, the chosen-ness of the United States together with favor for the new Israel is often taught and preached
- But today's reading from the Hebrew scriptures cuts against the grain of all of this favoritism and chosen-ness
- We've probably all heard of Jonah and whale, but probably very few of us have actually read the story
  - So I'd like to encourage you, in fact I would like to challenge you today or sometime soon, to take fifteen

minutes, pick up your Bibles, and turn to the little book of Jonah and read it all the way through

- And I promise you, that the book of Jonah is not only a quick read, but it is a story that is filled with humor and irony, and it has a profound ending
- Now the story of Jonah is about more than a whale
  - The whale is only an underwater Uber driver who takes Jonah from the direction that he wanted to go, to the direction that GOD wanted Jonah to go
  - You see, God wanted Jonah to go and be a prophet who would proclaim God's warning to the city of Nineveh
  - But Jonah didn't want to warn Nineveh, because the people in Nineveh were sinful, and the people of Nineveh were foreigners rather than part of God's chosen people, and in fact, the people of Nineveh were actually enemies of Jonah and the descendants of Sarah and Abraham – so Jonah tried to flee from God, and go as far away from Nineveh as possible, because he didn't want to warn them
  - Go read the story for more details!
  - God found ways to drag Jonah kicking and screaming to Nineveh, and this guy who wanted no part of being a prophet finally did what God wanted, and he reluctantly preached to the people in that great city the message "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"
  - And to Jonah's great disappointment, the people believed him. Even the king repented.
  - Because they repented, God did not overthrow Nineveh even though it was sinful, even though it was a foreign city, and even though it was Israel's enemy
  - Then Jonah threw a tantrum, angrily saying, "I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing [4:10]."
  - So Jonah – Jonah was so angry, that he went outside the city to place with a view, and he waited to see if perhaps God might change God's mind yet again, and maybe God might still destroy the Ninevites who he hated!
  - Like I've been saying, you really need to read the story!
  - In the end, Jonah was miserable, and God said to him, and God continues to say to us: "...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? [4:11]”

- Read the whole story, but the punch line is that God is concerned for all people – God is concerned for animals, and enemies, and foreigners, and even miserable old Jonah
- God’s concern is for everyone!
  - Long after Jonah, Jesus came, and he was crucified and raised not for a few nice people with the right family or national connections
  - Instead, in the words of Saint Paul’s teaching, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost! [1 Tim. 1:15]”
  - God’s desire and mission is not to play favorites – God in Jesus Christ came for everyone, because although we are sinners, God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”