

“I’m Not Going to Tell You Again!”—Jonah 3:1-3

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “I’m Not Going to Tell You Again!”, is Jonah 3:1-3 → *Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How many times growing up did you hear your parents say, “I’m not going to tell you again!” in an effort to make you do what you were told. Even if you were “blessed” with parents who didn’t tell you again with the accompaniment of physical pain, they still probably told you again . . . and again . . . and again.

I suspect this behavior even “haunts” you in your adult life. Are you told to do something over and over again by others, like a boss or fellow employee? I wonder if I’ve ever met a married couple who has never told each other to do something over and over again. I guess those are just “friendly reminders,” huh? Admit it! You get frustrated when someone doesn’t do something you told them to do the first time. You shouldn’t have to remind them again! At the same time you scratch your head in wonder when they get frustrated with you for not following their instructions the first time!

How do you think the LORD feels when we don’t do what He tells us to do . . . **the first time**? This was the situation with the prophet Jonah in our text. Verse 1 says that *the Word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time*. Why did Jonah have to be told again? Because the first time God told him to go and proclaim His word to Nineveh he ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. Why Tarshish? In light of what we know about the ancient world at that time it appears that it was a city the furthestmost distance from where Jonah lived. Guess if you want to run away from the LORD fleeing to the furthestmost end of the known world may seem like the most logical choice at the time.

Before you are too harsh in your judgment of Jonah’s actions put yourself in his sandals for a moment. What thoughts might go through your mind if you were commanded by the LORD to go preach judgment upon the sin of people who had no belief in Yahweh, the true Lord of heaven and earth? Would the thought of going into a city as one believer amongst 120,000+ unbelievers produced some fearful feelings in you? It did for Jonah. Think of how difficult it may be for you to confront someone about his sin with whom you do have a relationship let alone a bunch of people with whom you have no relationship! Can you blame Jonah?

However, when God told Jonah *the second time*, Jonah’s response was much different: *Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.* (verse 3) The LORD told him again because He was not going to give up on Jonah despite his reluctance and sin of disobedience. Of course, the LORD made a pretty compelling case by allowing Jonah to spend three days in the belly of a whale, during which Jonah repented of his sin and after which the fish vomited him up on shore. How can one argue with such a discipline and compelling influence as this?

Actually this is how God has had to deal with His people ever since the first disobedience to God’s command in the Garden of Eden. Yahweh constantly had to repeat His law, His will and His promises to people again and again and again for various reasons. Repetition was necessary when His written Word was not passed on to the next generation, so that the new generation would repent and not walk in the sinful, rebellious ways of the previous generations.

Repetition in the teachings of God’s Word are necessary because it is too easy to forget God’s will in the midst of the spiritual battles waged against your soul by the devil through temptations to sin. It was for just this reason → that Peter said in 2 Peter 1:12-15 → *I intend always to remind you of these qualities,*

*though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. . . to stir you up by way of reminder . . . I will make every effort so that you may be able at any time to recall these things. When it comes to God's Word, being told again and again and again is a safeguard for your faith in Christ!*

Maybe Jesus told His disciples again and again because they just didn't "get it" the first time. Even after receiving the Holy Spirit He continued to repeat His teachings to them as encouragement for their proclaiming God's Law and Gospel to a world living in disobedience to the LORD. Like Jesus' disciples and the prophet Jonah, we too can get mis-focused in our relationship with the LORD and lose sight of His promise: **that His Holy Spirit will work through us on His behalf as we simply trust Him and respond in obedience to His commands.** When speaking God's Word and will to people Jesus said in Matthew 10:19-20 → *Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For **it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.***

Have you "caved" to fear and self-centered insecurities at the thought of sharing God's Word with your neighbor, family or friend? Have you been so self-centered that you've refused to share the Gospel because you didn't think it would "work"—or because it "didn't work" in the past? And even if it did "work" you pouted because it didn't happen your way, in your time, according to your expectations! Ever been disabled in service to Christ because of a focus on your inabilities instead of the Holy Spirit's abilities? We must admit that we are sinners in company with the prophet Jonah who, like us, needed to repent and go share God's Word as a forgiven, renewed child of God!

What happened when Jonah finally did go to Nineveh and proclaimed God's Word to them? *The people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth* (cf. Jonah 3:3) as a sign of repentance before Yahweh! They *believed God* and humbled themselves in repentance before Him!

Jonah experienced the truth of the LORD's promise expressed in Isaiah 55:10-11 → *As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall **accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*** The Word of God **shared will be effective!** The Holy Spirit **will work** in the hearts of people through this means of grace!

Jonah experienced how God in His patience uses His people to be a life-changing force in an unbelieving world. Jonah 3:10 reveals Yahweh's response to their repentance: *When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.* In His love for sinners to experience His grace and forgiveness the LORD did not give up on Jonah, took the initiative and sent him **again** to proclaim His Word so that people could be saved! The LORD does not want anyone to suffer an eternity in hell so He acts to save them!

The LORD's telling us again and again and again in His unlimited patience with us sinners is fully expressed in the Person & Work of Jesus. In Matthew 12:40-41 Jesus referred to Jonah's ministry as a sign pointing to His own death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins. He said: *Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* He then declared to those who refused to believe in Him for salvation that the Ninevites would *rise up at the judgment with them and condemn them, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah.* Yet, those to whom Jesus was speaking refused to believe in Him, even though He was greater than Jonah!

Aren't you glad God our Father **doesn't** say to us: "I'm not going to tell you again!"? Even though you have sinned in disobedience to the LORD's commands, Jesus still tells you again and again and again when He brings you to Himself in repentance and faith: *Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.* (cf. John 8:11). Even though you have given the devil a foothold and allowed him to thwart your service to take God's Law and Gospel in Jesus to others, Jesus still tells you again and again and again

when He brings you to Himself in repentance and faith: *Whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.* (cf. John 6:37) Even though you have allowed yourself to be mis-focused in your sinful, self-centeredness, Jesus still tells you again and again and again when He brings you to Himself in repentance and faith: "You are forgiven! Feed my sheep!" (cf. John 21:15-17)

The LORD commands us as His Church to go and make disciples of all nations with His Word! It is a command sealed in His eternal forgiveness of your sins in the Person & Work of Jesus and backed by the power of His Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus in the lives of people! And . . . He does tell us again and again and again because all He has to work with are forgiven sinners bringing the forgiveness of sins to sinners living in a sinful world! Amen.

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.*

*Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed,  
for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*

(Joshua 1:9)