

Let us pray.

Mysterious Christ, we do not always understand your words. In you, we see a man who works miracles, yet who had no home of his own; a brother who inspires us to love our families, yet who calls us to greater commitments and allegiances. Your ministry calls disciples to find a new kind of security in homelessness, a new kind of family outside of blood kin. As we hear your words once again, increase our understanding, so that we might follow you more nearly. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading comes from the book of Jonah , chapter 3 : verses 1–5 , and verse 10 , found in the Pew Bible on page 1438 if you would like to follow along.

- 1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:
- 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."
- 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city-- a visit required three days.
- 4 On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."
- 5 The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

- 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

Our second reading comes from Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians , Chapter 7 : verses 29–31 , found in the Pew Bible on page 1779. However, I will be reading from The Message found printed in your bulletin.

- 29-31 I do want to point out, friends, that time is of the essence. There is no time to waste, so don't complicate your lives unnecessarily. Keep it simple —in marriage, grief, joy, whatever. Even in ordinary things—your daily routines of shopping, and so on. Deal as sparingly as possible with the things the world thrusts on you. This world as you see it is on its way out.

- 14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.
- 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"
- 16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.
- 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."
- 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.
- 19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.
- 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Most Rewarding "Job" of All.

The 10 most dangerous jobs are: timber cutters, fishers, pilots and navigators, structural metal workers, drivers, roofers, electrical power installers, farm workers, construction laborers and truck drivers.

Working can be hazardous to your health.

No figures exist— that we know of— that tell us how dangerous it is to be a pastor these days, although reliable sources suggest that lingering too long at food-laden tables at church potlucks can be a problem.

To this list, however, we've got to add the category "biblical prophet." No more dangerous job in the Bible than being a prophet. They frequently got killed.

And Jonah knew it. He knew how hazardous and difficult it could be to speak for God to the people, and he is far from enthusiastic when he receives a word from the Lord: Here is your mission: "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." (1:2).

It sounded like an impossible mission. Jonah is being sent to the capital of Assyria, a powerful enemy of Israel, and is being asked to preach against it. Like, who would volunteer today to fly to Damascus, or Riyadh, to walk the streets and call Muslim extremists to repent of their sins? Didn't think so.

So Jonah bolts in the opposite direction, taking off for Tarshish in an effort to escape the presence of the Lord. He hops on a boat, encounters a storm, is thrown overboard, and is swallowed by the famous fish. Finally he is spewed out on dry land, and the word of the Lord comes to him again: "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you" (3:2).

This time Jonah goes to Nineveh. Still smelling fishy, and his face and skin blanched and blotchy — the result, perhaps, of intestinal acids at work during his three-day sabbatical in a sea creature — he enters the city and walks for an entire day, making his way just a third of the distance across this daunting and dangerous city.

He must've looked like a paranormal apparition from *The Nightmare on Elm*

Street. "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" he shouts like a madman (3:4). This stinking, sticky prophet cries out against the 120,000 residents of an enormous and powerful city, not knowing if they will hear him and heed him or just tear him to pieces.

To everyone's surprise, the Ninevites believe in God, and repent of their sins. They proclaim a fast and put on sackcloth, young and old alike. Even the king of Nineveh rises from his throne, removes his robe, covers himself in sackcloth, and sits in ashes. He calls everyone in the city to turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands (3:8).

When God sees what they do, he changes his mind. They don't die; they live. Bummer.

Jonah goes over the edge, taking a killer job about as far as it will go. And what he finds on the other side is life.

There is a message for us in this story, but it has nothing to do with how

dangerous our work-world occupation may be, but instead with how dangerous it can be when in the service of a sovereign God.

Dangerous, however, only if we have pre-conceived notions about how God is supposed to function and operate within our own world.

If we volunteer to serve God with our own agenda, job description, outcome statements in hand — we're setting ourselves up for powerful disappointment
Ask Jonah.

The message of Jonah is all about hearing the word of God and obeying it. When we're obedient to God — even after a time of running in the opposite direction, as Jonah did — we find that our efforts result in life, not death.

Regardless of what career path we are pursuing, obedience to God can open up new possibilities for renewal and regeneration.

New life comes from obeying God, even when we're in a killer job.

Keep in mind that Jonah's primary problem was one of willful disobedience. When he originally turned and headed for Tarshish, he was disobeying a direct command of God.

Father Mapple, the preacher in another great fish story, Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*, points out that God often speaks to us in commands, because he knows that what he wants of us is difficult. "If we obey God, we must disobey ourselves," Mapple says; "and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein the hardness of obeying God consists."

Jonah disobeyed God, and this 'led to the near-death experience of being thrown into the sea and swallowed by a fish. But when he repented, as he was about to ask the citizens of Nineveh to do, and was obedient to God, then he discovered life for himself, and for the people of Nineveh. Renewal and regeneration came when he did the hard work of being obedient to the Lord.

The problem with obedience is that it is a tough sell. You hear the words "be obedient," and it sounds as if you are being asked to eat your vegetables and exercise 30 minutes a day. There's just nothing exciting about it, nothing to get you pumped up and inspired. But like good nutrition and exercise, obedience can enrich and even extend your life. There is nothing more deadly than poor eating habits, inactivity and disobedience to God.

Think about it. Disobedience can be seen in sexual promiscuity, which destroys lives both emotionally and physically. In his memoir, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, twenty-something author Dave Eggers describes a number of sexual encounter* and admits to his lingering fear that he has somehow contracted AIDS.

Don't have to pray about this: Sexual misbehavior is destructive. It's to act in direct disobedience to the known will of God.

Disobedience is at work when you cheat on your taxes, and fail to pay your fair share toward maintaining and improving the common good. We can disagree with how our federal, state and local taxes are being spent, but the bottom line is

that a ton of dollars, including our own, support medical programs for low-income children, feed dollars into our educational system and so on. Besides, we're told to render to Caesar.

You're doing the Jonah jog from God when you lie, whether it's to your friends, coworkers or family. When you fail to be a truth-teller, you lose the trust of people around you, and shatter the strands of accountability that hold a group of people together. Lying is a deathblow to community, whether you are part of a circle of high-school friends or a team of coworkers,

Promiscuity, cheating, lying — and expand this list as you see fit— these are "running away from God" kinds of sins,

So, what's the alternative? In a word, obedience. It can be dangerous work ___but rewarding.

Dangerous} because obedience, especially obedience and faithfulness to God, is not a particularly PC notion these days. It involves the quaint and often-reviled idea so bedeviled these days by moral relativists that there are a few things we can know.

The idea that we might be and ought to be faithful to a set of moral constructs will have people looking at us as though we're living in a fictive matrix, an alternative universe that bears no resemblance to postmodern realities.

Obedience. It's dangerous, because we might be laughed at

It's dangerous because we might be misunderstood,

It's dangerous because we'll have to put the interests of others ahead of our own.

It's dangerous because it could send us into territory hitherto unexplored .It's dangerous because we can't be sure what God might ask of us.

It's dangerous because being obedient doesn't come naturally to us,

It's dangerous because we'll be asked to turn the other cheek.

It's dangerous because we'll be asked to love our enemies.

It's dangerous because we'll be asked to be a peacemaker.

y because we'll be asked to pray for those who "despitefully use" Its dangerous us.

Before you book your ticket for Tarshish, remember that while being in God's service can be hazardous, it is also the only place that offers blessing and a sense of peace.

High risk/high reward. That's what it's all about.

The 10 most dangerous jobs in America. The list says nothing about "disciple of Jesus Christ."

Sign up for that "job" and you're signing up for the toughest — but most rewarding — ""job" of all.