

Good morning, everyone.

It's so beautiful  
to be here now  
together.

I'd like to frame my comments with a quote from our friend and co-founder Bev Cosby who preached one Sunday saying to this community with his firm but gentle conviction "I know almost nothing of what I'm talking about today."

It's even more true for me,  
so THANK YOU in advance for not leaving now.

[pause]

I'd like to invite you to  
close your eyes  
if you feel comfortable doing so  
Let's tap into visual silence  
for the next few minutes  
or for as long as you like, frankly

If not, that's ok too no worries.

Eyes closed,  
first, let's invite God in  
with three deep breaths together.

Inhaling deeply together, holding for several moments,  
and exhaling completely.

Inhaling deeply in, holding it, exhaling completely

inhaling, hold it..  
And let it all go.

I've simply got 4 things to share which have been powerful for me.

Those that know me are saying

“Ha, yeah right?!? Only four?”

Really, with help from this community – and I don't just mean members of  
this church,

Henri Nouwen

and the Book of Jonah, I have four things to say today.

1. Church is not a place.
2. God's love has no exceptions
3. To pray is to live.
4. And reflection question:  
Who am I really and what do I really want?

I'm so grateful

For the experiences

I've had with this & offshoots of

THIS COMMUNITY

BEING CHURCH HERE TODAY.

For it taught me from an early age that

**Church is not a place.**

Having grown up across the road

I learned most deeply from this community that

Church is NOT

a perfect preparation of pews & pulpits.

nor a monument of bricks & mortar

nor a careful collection of candles & crosses,

No, church is not a place.

Church is NOT just a beautiful appointment of stained glass apertures  
or an echoing endowment of instruments and organs.

It's NOT a structural stronghold of soaring steeples  
And it's most certainly NOT  
a mindless Sunday routine of mandatory motions.

Church is none of those,  
Church isn't a place.

It's a "Being - ness"

It is a state of being that takes place in the space  
of connectedness between us.

It's the illimitable, inexplicable  
Power of being in the  
open space  
that connects  
the human and divine in me to the human and divine in each of you.

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Now eyes closed in visual silence,  
Again if you are comfortable,  
Imagine with me now:  
Imagine a patient being brought to the doctor's office.  
worried, unsure of what's going on  
As the doctor begins to assess what's going on

The patient visibly  
appears inwardly afraid.  
That fear begins to translate outwardly into physical alarm.  
For everyone's safety  
The staff realizes it must take all of the patient's belongings.  
In so doing, they discover  
the Patient's right fist  
clenching ever so desperately  
to a single small coin.

The Patient refuses to release it -  
The staff pry open the clenched hand.  
As the Patient resists with mortal fear,  
Holding on, believing  
that when its finally gone  
There would be nothing left  
There would be nothing more  
That HE or SHE would BE  
NOTHING MORE.

Imagine now  
your field of vision closes in  
on the clenching hand

a sense of familiarity arises  
you recognize the hand,  
and its clenching fear.

it's your brothers  
your partner's  
your friend's hand

it's your father's  
your boss'  
your dying grandmother's hand

you've seen it before  
in fact  
now we recognize that hand is also our own

The book of Jonah is a divine tale,  
a satire that reveals not just the nature of God,  
but of the nature of ourselves.

It is a story of fleeing from God,  
Of resisting our personal call  
Of missing God's relentless cues  
Of holding on to our clenched fists  
and of Leaning too much on our own understanding

It's a story of the power of prayer.

[fast]  
And in today's narcotized,  
pseudo-intellectualized,  
and spiritually vacuous  
global consumer capitalist culture —  
this isn't just a kid's story!!

- Jonah's is increasingly  
THE STORY OF US ALL.

Imagine with me now,  
eyes closed if you like  
the story of Jonah:

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah:

2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against its wickedness"

3 But Jonah ran in the opposite direction

away from the Lord

to the city of Joppa,

where he boarded a ship to Tarshish - to flee from the Lord.

4 Then God sent a great wind and storm threatening to break up the ship.

5 All the sailors were afraid and cried out to their own god.

And threw cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

Meanwhile Jonah went below the deck,

and fell into a deep sleep.

6 The captain went down and said, "How can you sleep? Get up. Call on your god! Maybe he will save us."

7 Then the sailors cast lots

to see who was responsible and the lot fell on Jonah.

So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for all this trouble? What work do you do? From what country & people are you?"

9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

10 “What have you done?” they asked,  
terrified after he told them he was running from the Lord.

11 The sea got rougher & rougher.  
“What should we do to you to make the sea calm down?” they asked in  
fear.

12 “Throw me into the sea and it will be calm,” he replied, “this great  
storm is my fault.”

13 Instead, the men tried to row back to land.  
But they couldn't.  
The sea grew wilder.  
Then they cried,  
“Please, Lord, don't let us die for taking this innocent man's life” and they  
threw Jonah  
overboard.  
The raging sea grew calm.  
And the men feared God,  
Who then sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah.  
Inside the fish for three days and three nights,

Jonah prayed to the Lord saying  
“In distress, I called for help and you answered.  
You hurled me into the deep swirling seas,  
All your waves sweeping over me.  
I said, ‘I am gone from your sight;  
yet I will look again to your holy temple.’  
The waters engulfed me  
the deep surrounded me;  
To the roots of the mountains I sank;

But you, Lord,  
brought my life up from the pit.  
“When my life was swept away,  
I remembered you,  
and my prayer rose to you,  
to your holy temple.

8 “Those who cling to worthless idols  
turn away from God’s love.

9 But I, with shouts of grateful praise,  
will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’”

10 And then the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land.

3 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time:

“Go to the great city of Nineveh  
and proclaim to it  
the message I give you.”

Jonah obeyed. He went a day’s journey into Ninevah proclaiming, “Forty  
more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

And The Ninevites believed God.

The Ninevites believed.

From the greatest to the least of them, they fasted & put on sackcloth,

6 Even the king, who proclaimed:

“Let everyone call urgently on God and give up their evil ways and  
violence. For God may with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that  
we will not die.”



10 When God saw them turn from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah thought God was wrong, and he became angry.

He prayed to the Lord,

“This is what I said when I was still at home

That’s why I fled to Tarshish.

I KNEW

that you are a gracious and compassionate God,

slow to anger and abounding in love.

a gracious and compassionate God,

slow to anger and abounding in love.

Now, Lord, take away my life.

It is better for me to die than to live.”

God replied, “Do you do well to be angry?”

Jonah went to the east of the city.

He made a shelter & sat in its shade,

waiting to watch Ninevah perish.

6 Then the Lord made a leafy plant grow up over Jonah

to shade his head & ease his discomfort.

Jonah was very happy.

But at dawn the next day God sent a worm

to chew the plant to make it wither.

When the sun rose, God sent a scorching east wind,

the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so he grew faint and said,

“I would be better to die than to live.”

9 But God said to Jonah,

“Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

“Yes, angry enough to die.”

But the Lord said, “You’re worried about this plant? But you didn’t even tend it or grow it.

Shouldn’t I have concern for the great city of Nineveh, with more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

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At the heart of the story is what it reveals about the nature of God:

1)  
gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger  
and abounding in love.

A LOVE that has no exception.

God’s steadfast love is for us ALL.  
It’s for the Ninevites, for Jonah. For us all.

After repeated abuse by Jonah, God still works with him.

Jonah gets angry. “Do you do well to be angry?”

He gets angry again – “Do you do well to be angry?”

The Ninevites – who skinned and tortured and killed,  
repented & believed.

Boom. Done.

But Jonah required some work,  
and No-Exceptions God keeps coming back to do that work,  
however many times it takes.

Doing whatever work is necessary.

The story of Jonah incites us to self-inquiry.

For our lives and specifically for our faiths.

It begs desperately the question of ourselves:

*Who are we really? And what do we really want? How do we really want to be?*

Fallible, but our truest essence is like that of God.

Made in his image

We are Light,

we are loving and compassionate, patient and kind.

That is who we really are.

But isn't that what we want to?

To be ourselves.

To be gracious and compassionate,

slow to anger,

abounding in love

- feels like the right desire for our lives on earth

If Jonah really looked at himself in the mirror –

if he had a way to be more aware of himself –

his selfish, unconscious, avoiding, stubborn, angry, unfaithful self,

I suspect he would want something different.

**Who we really are and what we really want?**

**How does that play out in how we live?**

I lean so much on my own understanding.

We get so lost in our own identities

In the world

In our analysis

In our logic

In our fears or social paranoia or unconsciousness

In all our personal struggles

That we forget we were made to be like God.

And we resist what he's called us to do

Avoiding him, even knowing that we can't avoid her –

look at Jonah, down in the ship, sleeping..

All of us are prone to self-deception, unconsciousness and surface-level over conceptualization.

For me it has been prayer that's helped me see more honestly What I've been holding on to?

And I've experienced for myself that

**To Pray is To Live.**

To Pray is to Be Free.

But is our practice of prayer

– sufficiently – down and in (as Parker Palmer frames it)

– sufficiently opening and inviting, not asking and requesting.

Is our prayer Sufficiently FAITH-FUL, not Demand-full.

Jonah's prayers are all over the place,

from praising god's Grace in the one that get's him out of the fish.

To letting – God - have it!

He literally verbally lashes out at God in prayer, telling God he's wrong..

Our dear friend Peter said to me so lovingly one Friday @ Common Grounds:

“I’m sick of everyone using prayer to order God around”

Henry Nouwen can school us on prayer better than me so here are some of his wisdoms on prayer:

“Some tell you: “You have to be able to forgive yourself.”

But that isn’t possible.

What is possible

is to open your hands without fear,

so the Other can blow your sins away.

You begin to pray and you feel a bit of new freedom,

[it] becomes a joy.

You begin to suspect that to pray is to live.

There is [a] connection between prayer and silence,

...[and] To be calm and quiet by yourself means to be fully awake...

Deep silence leads us to suspect that,

in the first place,

prayer is acceptance.

A person who prays is a person standing with his hands open to the world.

She knows that God will show himself

in the nature which surrounds her, in the people she meets, in the situations she runs into.

The [person] who prays opens herself to God and can freely breathe again... and move where [she] wishes with no fears to haunt her.

The important thing about prayer is not whether it is [a] petition, thanksgiving or praise,

but whether it is...of hope or of little faith.

Praying means giving up a false security.  
[It] means to stop expecting from God  
[the] same small-mindedness which [we] discover in ourselves.  
The man who prays not only discovers himself and God,  
but in the same meeting he discovers who his neighbor is.  
At precisely this point, compassion is born.

Praying means breaking through the veil of existence and allowing yourself  
to be led by the Vision which has become real to you – Whatever [you]  
call that Vision” The Unseen Reality, The total Other, the Numen, the  
Spirit, the Father, Mother, Abba

The praying woman is the woman who inspires the world,  
who looks on it with compassion and,  
in this glance,  
penetrates to the source of all being.

When [we] pray we open ourselves to the influence of the Power which  
has revealed itself as Love.

Prayer is a revolutionary matter

Because once you begin,

You put your entire life in the balance.

Praying means being constantly ready

To let go of your certainty and to

Move on further...

To pray means to open your hands before God.

It means slowly relaxing the tension

which squeezes your hands together

and accepting your existence with an increasing readiness,

Not as a possession to defend but as a gift to receive

Prayer leads you to see new paths

and to hear new melodies in the air.

Praying is not some necessary compartment in the daily schedule of a Christian or a source of support in a time of need, nor is it restricted to Sunday morning or as a frame to surround mealtime.

Praying is LIVING.

A life in prayer is a life with open hands

where you are not ashamed of your weakness

but realize that it is more perfect  
for a us to be led by the Other  
thank to seek to hold everything  
in our own hands.

In all [our] moments, [we] gradually [can] make our lives more a prayer  
and open our hands [and hearts] to be led by God  
Even to where we would rather not go.

Thank you Henri Nouwen.

Finally,

I leave you an unprompted message from a soul wise beyond his 4 years,  
a message from God's very own Jonah Adams.

This Friday morning at the lodge as we were getting a glass of water,  
Jonah professed:

“Are you the boss or is God the boss?”

He paused.

And then,

before I could respond,

he answered himself,  
with *his own* firm & gentle conviction:  
“God’s the boss. God’s the boss of everyone.”

And landing that in what the story of Jonah  
and the practice of prayer and meditation has gifted me,

She’s a gracious and compassionate Boss  
slow to anger  
abounding in patient & persistent Love,

Love for us all.

Thank you for listening.