

# THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY



Jonah prayed... "I know you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." (Job 4:2)

## THE SERVICE FOR THE LORD'S DAY

January 24, 2021  
10:45 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church, Bryan, Texas  
Link to worship videos available at: [www.fpcbryan.org](http://www.fpcbryan.org)

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

### PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

This Is My Father's World

arr. Carol Tornquist

### WELCOME

Psalm 23 declares,  
"The Lord leads me into green pastures, beside still waters,  
through the valley of death's shadow, to a table of both  
friends and enemies for our healing together."

### HYMN

The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want

BROTHER JAMES' AIR

**The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want. He makes me down to lie  
In pastures green; he leadeth me the quiet waters by.  
In pastures green; he leadeth me the quiet waters by.**

**My soul he doth restore again, and me to walk doth make  
Within the paths of righteousness, e'en for his own name's sake.  
Within the paths of righteousness, e'en for his own name's sake.**

**Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear no ill,  
For thou art with me and thy rod and staff me comfort still.  
For thou art with me and thy rod and staff me comfort still.**

**My table thou hast furnished in presence of my foes.  
My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.  
My head thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.**

**Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me,  
And in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be.  
And in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be.**

PRAYERS OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

Let us pray . . . **O Gracious and Exalted One, the expanse of the created order, from ocean trenches to the stars of far galaxies, commands our awe and praise. Yet your love and grace for all equally – or more so – commands our awe and praise. We can list our failings and offenses in relation to you and others, and never remember them all. Hear our confessions in these moments of silence. . .**

*(pausing in silence for prayer)*

Forgive us all our sin. Restore us to a repaired and empowered life, for faithfully and steadfastly serving you in the way and spirit of Jesus Christ. Friends, let us hear and share with gladness the blessed news of the Gospel:

**In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!**

HYMN OF RESPONSE NO. 606

Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow

OLD HUNDREDTH

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE READING

Jonah 3:1-5,10; 4:1-5,8-11

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

HYMN NO. 735

I Need Thee Every Hour

NEED

**I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord:  
no tender voice like thine can peace afford.**

REFRAIN **I need thee, O I need thee, every hour I need thee!  
O bless me now, my Savior—I come to thee!**

**I need thee every hour; stay thou near by;  
temptations lose their power when thou art nigh. REFRAIN**

**I need thee every hour; teach me thy will,  
and thy rich promises in me fulfill. REFRAIN**

**I need thee every hour, Most Holy One;  
O make me thine indeed, thou blessed Son. REFRAIN**

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION God's Counseling for Boundary-Crossing, Against-All-Odds, Life-Changing Love

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, CONSECRATION, INTERCESSION, AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray . . . Eternal God, receive our humble and continuing thanks for your gifts every day. When challenges are both small and great, you bless: with love; with sensitive consciences; with tenacious, steadfast hope and conviction; and you bless with faithful prophets, and with the embodiment of your holiness in Jesus Christ.

Receive our intercessions for this world, this nation, this church, and all your people everywhere, all the time. Bring to each person: your healing and wholeness; your peace, compassion, respect, wisdom, and forgiveness; your reconciling of relationships personally, locally, nationally, and globally. May Jesus's costly friendship – with every type of person through his life – be our model and pathway for salvation;

And may the prayer Jesus taught be ours again this morning as we turn to you, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven; hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

**Give to the winds thy fears; hope, and be undismayed.  
God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears; God shall lift up thy head.**

**Through waves and clouds and storms God gently clears the way.  
Wait patiently; so shall this night soon end in joyous day.**

**Leave to God's sovereign sway to choose and to command.  
So shalt thou, wondering, own God's way, how wise, how strong God's hand!**

**Let us in life, in death, thy steadfast truth declare,  
and publish with our final breath thy love and guardian care.**

## DISMISSAL AND BLESSING

## POSTLUDE

I Am Thine, O Lord

arr. Cindy Berry

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The prayerful support and sympathy of the congregation are extended to:

- Carmella & George Edwards and their family following the death of George's mother, Mary Edwards, of St. Petersburg, FL, on January 20.
- Marlee & Pete Criaco, and their daughters Briana & Angela, following the death of Pete's mother, Bess Criaco of Austin, TX, on January 20.

*"I am the resurrection and life," saith the Lord. —John 11:25*

**ASSISTED LISTENING DEVICES** are available in the narthex. Please help yourself or ask an usher for assistance.

**NEW MEMBERS** may be received any Sunday by profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or transfer of membership. If you feel led to inquire about becoming a church member or deepening your commitment as a disciple of Jesus Christ, please indicate your desire on the fellowship folder. You may also call the church (979.823.8073) or email Pastor Ted Foote ([tfoote@fpcbryan.org](mailto:tfoote@fpcbryan.org)) or Associate Pastor Emily Béghin ([ebeghin@fpcbryan.org](mailto:ebeghin@fpcbryan.org)). They will be glad to arrange a mutually convenient Sunday when you can be received by the Elders and introduced to the congregation.

By vote of Session on December 30, First Presbyterian moved to **an altered Sunday morning format for an indefinite time (hopefully not long), that began January 3<sup>rd</sup>**. Due to the COVID-19 infection, active case, and hospitalization rates, FPC – to assist the efforts of health providers and public officials – is suspending Sunday morning "full worship" in the sanctuary. **The sanctuary will be open in this calendar period each Sunday, from 10:40 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (regular time) for "come-and-go" contemplation, prayer, and receiving the Lord's Supper. All who choose to participate in this opportunity are encouraged to wear a mask and observe physical distancing.**

**Visit us on the web!** [www.fpcbryan.org](http://www.fpcbryan.org) for the newsletter, announcements, worship bulletins, updates, etc.

**Check us out on Facebook** [www.facebook.com/FPCBryan](http://www.facebook.com/FPCBryan)

**NEW!!! on Instagram** [www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com) Search for and follow **fpcbryantx1867** and/or **fpcbryan\_youth**

**BE THE FIRST TO KNOW** when **WORSHIP** and **ACTIVITY** videos are uploaded to our **YouTube channel!**

Go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), search for First Presbyterian Church of Bryan, Texas, then click **SUBSCRIBE**

**Share prayer needs and church group news with fellow FPC participants on Church Updates!**

is FPC-Bryan's online tool for YOU to post church-related announcements, ways to serve, and your current prayer needs. While users receive a weekly reminder email on Thursdays to view new posts, this online tool is "REAL TIME."

Contact Karen in the church office, 979.823.8073 or [office@fpcbryan.org](mailto:office@fpcbryan.org) to set up your account.

Then, login at <https://fpcbtx.churchupdates.org/login> to create your password-protected account.



## A WARM WELCOME!

*We are delighted that you chose  
to worship with us today.*

### WORSHIP NOTES

#### PREACHER

Rev. Ted Foote

#### LITURGIST

Rev. Dr. George E. Klett

#### MUSICIANS

Michelle Lassiter, *piano and flute*

David Kipp,

*Director of Music Ministries*

#### AUDIO-VISUAL | SOUND

Nicole McKinley

Jerry Norris

Bill Watson

#### COVER ART

“Jonah leaving the whale,” ca. 1770  
by French painter

Claude Joseph Vernet (1714-1789)

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*The Presbyterian Hymnal*

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### THIS WEEK AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

#### THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, JANUARY 24, 2021

9:00am Loose Leaf Church School Class-via Zoom

9:20am Seekers Church School Class-via Zoom

**10:40am Sanctuary** \* open for prayer, meditation, and Lord's Supper;

WORSHIP pre-recorded, viewable via [www.fpcbryan.org](http://www.fpcbryan.org), with click on homepage “sentence about worship” or small red YouTube box in far top right of homepage screen

#### MONDAY, JANUARY 25, 2021

12:30pm Circle I-via Zoom

5:30pm Cub Scout Pack 350-FH

7:00pm Boy Scout Troop 976-FH

#### TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2021

5:30pm Foundation Trustees-via Zoom

#### WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021

10:45am Staff Meeting-L

#### THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2021

#### FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 2021

#### SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 2021

#### FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, JANUARY 31, 2021

9:00am Loose Leaf Church School Class-via Zoom

9:20am Seekers Church School Class-via Zoom

**10:40am Sanctuary** \* open for prayer, meditation, and Lord's Supper;

WORSHIP pre-recorded, viewable via [www.fpcbryan.org](http://www.fpcbryan.org), with click on homepage “sentence about worship” or small red YouTube box in far top right of homepage screen

\* *During COVID-19, Room 108 is available for your nursery needs*

The deadline for the next issue of the newsletter is Noon, Sunday, February 7. It will be distributed on Wednesday, February 10, 2021. This newsletter will cover news from February 18 thru March 3.

## God's Counseling for Boundary-Crossing, Against-All-Odds, Life-Changing Love

Jonah 3:1-5,10; 4:1-5,8-11

January 24, 2021

Ted V. Foote, Jr.

First Presbyterian Church, Bryan, Texas

In 1872 Ms. Annie Hawks of Brooklyn, New York, wrote the words of the hymn we just sang – “I Need Thee Every Hour.” The music for the hymn was composed by her pastor, Robert Lowry. Ms. Hawks’ and Pastor Lowry’s prayer to God in 1872 was, “I need Thee every hour.” As this four-chapter story of Jonah and God begins, it is fairly clear that God desires Jonah for out-reach ministry more than Jonah desires God. Jonah never disbelieves God. He never believes there is no God. Jonah, though, seems not to be singing and praying, “I need Thee every hour.” Jonah prefers his choices in life to God’s desire for him to serve in a particular way, time, and location. And, in this contest between God and Jonah, often Jonah is fairly “matter of fact.” When the westward journeying sailors – who did not share Jonah’s faith in the God of Abraham and Sarah – hoped for the sea storm to calm, but it would not, Jonah is engaged in a more deliberative conversation with them than Jonah – to that point – has been engaged with God. “Yes,” he says, “God has reason to be on my case.” So the sailors reluctantly toss Jonah overboard, praying that the God of Abraham and Sarah (and Jonah) will not hold them at fault for his drowning. And, studying this book, we discover God is not going to hold the sailors accountable for Jonah’s death for two reasons: (1) God is as much their Sovereign as Jonah’s; and (2) God, before Jonah can drown, sends a huge fish to swallow him, to give Jonah oxygenated space in the fish’s stomach wherein Jonah can have the conversation with God which Jonah has heretofore been avoiding.

This story, once introducing Jonah’s being swallowed by the gi-normous fish, conveys to listeners that God is not giving up on Jonah being part of God’s outreach of boundary-crossing, against-all-odds, life-changing love. Now, with Jonah jostling around in the abdomen of the super-sized fish, he prays to God seeking deliverance and indicating he feels immensely grateful not to have drowned. So God causes the fish to belch – as with indigestion, and Jonah washes up on the beach. Now God has Jonah’s attention and Jonah’s sense of owing God his life. God presses the reset button and commissions Jonah a second time. Jonah this time goes east as God directs. Once he arrives in Nineveh, as God directed, Jonah energetically carries out the mission God intended, yet Jonah intensely hoped all along that the outcome would yield God destroying the Ninevites in a rage, because Jonah never liked the Ninevites. Jonah was from the region of Galilee in northern Israel, about 15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee. He was a nationalist who cared not one bit for the Ninevites of Assyria out to the east (today the nation of Iraq). If Jonah had to carry a message to the Ninevites that God was displeased with them, Jonah was – finally, when pushed by God – willing to do that, but he felt within passionate hope that God would follow through with the destruction of Nineveh and all the Ninevites.

Jonah’s attitude, at this point, clashes with God again; and, of all people, Jonah himself says to God that he (Jonah) is absolutely not surprised. “I knew it! I knew it! I knew it!” Chapter 4, verse 2 is Jonah’s resented statement of faith. Resented because he never wanted it to be so – Jonah never wanted to be engaged by such faith from God for outreach like this. Rather, Jonah has sensed for years that God is different with God’s personal care for every person which Jonah resists and resents. Jonah’s prayer: “I pray, okay, God. I pray – and isn’t this what I’ve said most of my years? Isn’t this why you and I have never been close? – acknowledging – saying to your face – how you are, from your heart to your outreach, gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love, and you will repent – you will turn from, you will change your plans from destroying. You have open arms even for the enemies of Galilee and Israel. Now (1) you’ve got what you wanted from these ‘sorry excuse for human beings’ Ninevites. (2) You’ve got what you wanted from me. Now just let me die here. Of all places, ironically, in Nineveh, having done your bidding!”

God replies to the downcast prophet with such genuine concern that God sounds like a clinical therapist or caring colleague: “Jonah, I get the impression that you are feeling resentful and angry. Will your resentment and anger be a help to you going forward?” Embittered Jonah has no reply at this point.

He departs downtown Nineveh, making his way to a park with an overlook facing the city. A bush gives Jonah shade from the intense direct sunlight. Then, when an insect consumes it, the bush dies. Jonah no longer has shade. Jonah's direct exposure to the celestial ball of daytime fire increases. It's like August in Yuma, Arizona. Then, with sweat pouring down his forehead and his back, close to dehydration, far from Galilee, Jonah mumbles, declaring a second time at verse 9, what he stated at verse 3: "I might as well die."

God senses how Jonah's attitude is a debilitating burden interfering with - essentially blocking the way for - future engagement with God and with others in God's world. This can happen with any of us - individuals or groups: Our attitudes can become burdens interfering with or blocking God's ways for future engagement. God approaches Jonah respectfully in the hope that Jonah's attitude will develop more positively. So God, in a sense, prays back to Jonah with a gentle statement and a probing question: "Jonah, you are most recently here angry that your shade has dried up and disappeared. Yet you did not create that shade." Silence. Jonah knows, and we the readers and hearers also know that Jonah did not create the shade from the bush. It was God's gift.

That was God's statement: "You did not create that shade." Then God's question: "If I gave you the shade, even when you were furious with me - if I am the source of the bush growing to create shade for you, should I not also be able to have compassion on the citizens of Nineveh, whether you hate them or not, as great a population as they are?" Silence again. End of story; or is it? You may know that this is the only one of the 66 books in the Protestant Scriptures which ends in a question. It's God's question to Galilean Jonah, who is silent in an unsettled attitude sitting in that park overlooking Nineveh, Assyria (or Iraq). And it is God's question to Ted Foote and everyone else.

How logical and honest it is for Jonah, for me, for you, for anyone to reply to God: "God, you really don't surprise me that you have compassion even for those I resent and detest. You can be who you want to be, but I really don't like it when you engage me in your outreach which requires me to cross boundaries I am not interested in crossing, to be a part - against all routine odds - of your life-changing love at work with others. And you expect that boundary-crossing, against-all-odds, life-changing love to include me?!" That essentially has been Jonah's reply back to God, if Jonah were to communicate as God did, with a question. And it's my reply, as well. Quite possibly, it's yours. "God, you expect your boundary-crossing, against-all-odds, life-changing love for EVERYONE to include me?!" And there is silence from heaven. Not because God does not care to answer, but because God does not need to answer. Jonah, and you, and I already know.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in October 1967, told 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade public school students at Barratt Jr. High in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: "In your life's blueprint, you must include a commitment to the eternal principles of beauty, love, and justice. Don't allow anybody to pull you so low as to make you hate them. Don't allow anybody to cause you to lose your self-respect to the point that you do not struggle for justice, no matter how young or old you are. You have a responsibility to seek to make your nation a better nation in which to live; and you have a responsibility to seek to make life (in the whole world) better for everybody." Like Jonah and like Dr. King, we know deep within how God is fully committed, among all people, to engagement with boundary-crossing, against-all-odds, life-changing love. God's question daily for each and all of us is a question of faith-orientation. Jonah had his prejudices, his grumpiness, his stubbornness. We all have some unhelpful characteristics. The question, though, on which God waits for our answer by faith-orientation is this: Are you and I "all in" for the responsibility God seeks from us? It's boundary-crossing, against-all-odds, life-changing love.

Remember: God's Plan A was for Jonah simply to go east to Nineveh. When Jonah went west, the big fish swallowing him and burping him out in order to create a U-turn was God's Plan B. Even with our prejudices, grumpiness, and stubbornness, isn't it easier to go with God's Plan A in the first place, experiencing and participating with open anticipation in that boundary-crossing, against-all-odds, life-changing love from God? Isn't that easier? It would seem so. - All honor and praise be to God.