

Jonah 3:1-10.

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. ⁶ When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." 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.

As a father, every once and in a while, I am amazed at the power of a few words. Yes, there are often times that my words are completely ignored by kids busy with other things, but more than a few times my kids have surprised me by repeating something I said almost word for word or acting in a way that followed my exact request. Evidently, my words were *actually* heard and they *did* have weight and meaning and importance to my children. They remembered that phrase; they remembered that lesson taught or the few words that I spoke. And in that moment of recognition there is wonderful moment of encouragement as it suddenly becomes apparent that those little bits of wisdom sunk in, those words of rebuke did have an impact, or those seeds of instruction actually took root. Maybe you can relate, or maybe you can remember something that your father said, a lesson that your dad impressed upon you, words of wisdom that he shared, that proved that there was power in the words of your father. Maybe at the time you didn't realize it but looking back it is obvious that those words left their mark on you. There was power in his words.

Now, with that said, if we are able to recognize that there is power in the words and the bits of wisdom that come from our fathers, then how much more powerful are the words of our perfect heavenly Father!

There is power in the Word of God the Father

- 1. The Word brings forth fruit in time.**
- 2. Share his Words of Wisdom and Power.**

The Word of the LORD often takes its effect in gradual and deliberate ways. That is why Jesus, in our Gospel for today, compares the kingdom of God to a growing seed and a mustard seed. What seems to be something that is so insignificant and so small and so powerless actually has tremendous power and produces incredible results! Little by little that tiny seed grows into a full grown plant that is big enough to produce good things like fruit and shade. In the same way faith is created and strengthened in a gradual way. Fruits of faith such as trust in the LORD, and lives of repentance and obedience, service and love, are not often formed and shaped overnight. Instead, such results are most often produced gradually through regular contact with the word. However, every once in a while the LORD presents us with an example of the opposite, an example of sudden fruit and immediate results, in order to encourage us, in order to confirm for us, without a shadow of a doubt, the absolute truth that there is power in the Word of God the Father.

Such was the case in ancient Nineveh. ***“40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”*** That was the Word of the LORD that Jonah proclaimed when he finally made it to Nineveh. It was a simple message that allowed for a limited amount of time. 40 days was a period of time that wasn't too immediate, but it wasn't an extensive amount of time either. ***“40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”*** And we remember that was the message more than the messenger that was the source of the power. We remember Jonah's overall attitude concerning those people of Nineveh and how it was out of tune with that which God desired from his prophet. There was a part of Jonah that was kind of looking forward to seeing those 40 days run out, so that the LORD would bring the hurt down on these terrible and violent and ungodly people. But what happened, instead? The 40 days did not run out, in fact, the powerful Word of God seemed to take effect almost immediately.

As we read from the book of Jonah we see that the prophet proclaimed God's Word on that first day, ***“40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned,”*** and the very next words were, ***“The Ninevites believed God.”*** In order to teach his prophet about the power of the Word, in order to show generations of believers just how powerful God's Word is and how extensive and abundant is the grace of our LORD, there were immediate results in Nineveh that were well outside of the ordinary; the results were, in fact, extraordinary. This was not a case of a few people gradually coming to faith by the methodical training in the Word of God, but this was a vivid and obvious miracle of God's saving power. A major ancient city filled with violent and immoral unbelievers suddenly believed in the LORD and they were all led to produce bountiful and obvious fruits of repentance. The people of this large city all turned from their wicked ways as they declared a fast as they all put on sackcloth and confessed their sin before a holy God. We are told that even the king of Nineveh himself ***rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.*** What incredible impact that the Word of God had! What remarkable power in this simple message! The Word of the LORD went out and changed an entire city filled with immoral and ungodly people and they all produced immediate fruits of faith. We are told that from the greatest of them to the least of them sat down in sackcloth and ashes as they called on the name of the LORD. The LORD in his

great mercy heard their call and the LORD God relented and did not send the destruction that he had warned would come.

This is obviously an account that sticks out as remarkable, and out of the ordinary. And so we might ask, "Why?" This is not how the Word ordinarily works. Why, would God have this event recorded for us in the pages of Scripture? Well, does this account not serve as a wonderful encouragement to believers! This is one of those memorable moments of recognition that provides welcome encouragement for the believer! An entire city was changed. There is power in the Word of God the Father.

In our everyday lives as we are surrounded by violence and hatred and unbelief this is welcome reminder that God's Word has the power to completely change hearts and minds. In our everyday lives as we slowly grow and progress and sometimes regress in our lives as Christians, here is this account that is place before us so that we are reminded us of the power of God's Word. Like the father who is so pleasantly encouraged in his daily task of raising his children by that sudden moment of acknowledgement, the LORD grants to his Church the historical account of this remarkable event so that we may be rescued from doubt and frustration and instead we are encouraged in the faith. There is power in the Word of the LORD. There is power in the Word that will strengthen our faith. There is power in the Word as we reach out with that saving message to our neighbors.

Just look at the amazing results that the Word of the LORD has had on your life. It may not have been immediate, it may not have even been within a few moments or even a period of 40 days, but through the power of the Word of God, the LORD brought you to faith. Throughout the span of your life, God the Father brought you into his family, and strengthened you in the faith. He has called you out the darkness of unbelief into his wonderful light. An enemy of God, you became his child through Baptism, through the Spirit working through water and the word. The Lord led you to serve him and praise him through good times and difficult times. Through the power of his Word God and the sacraments God has raised you up to praise him as you produced countless fruits of faith. Fruits of obedience and repentance were brought about through the power of the Word. Sins were confessed and forgiven and buried and put away. Your life was changed, and continues to be changed, in deliberate and gradual ways as your Heavenly Father's Words of wisdom and grace has molded and shaped your life. You have learned of your Savior who gave so much for you and your life has been changed by his love. Forgiveness and kindness and compassion modeled after Christ's love for you continue to emerge as virtues in your life because of the impact of simple, yet divinely powerful, words. Some might view these as simply words written on a page, but they are important and powerful for you because your heavenly Father shared them with you. The results may not have come immediately like they did in Nineveh, but the results are still are so remarkable: a sinner lost in wickedness and unbelief has been changed by the powerful Word of God into a believer who willingly produces fruits of faith to God's glory. Yes, the Word of the LORD is powerful. The Word of the LORD brings forth fruit in its time.

God uses these results of the word, he uses the growth of the Word in your life and in the life of the church as a source of encouragement as we live out our Christian faith. We

marvel at the sudden change in the people of Nineveh. We rejoice in the gradual work of his Word in our life. We give thanks for the effect of the Word within this congregation as a few more ministries and members and families and children have been added to our numbers throughout the last few years. We give thanks as we consider - like Paul did in our reading from the Colossians – how God’s Word continues to God and spread throughout the world as the Spirit performs his saving work in various different places and locations and in various ways.

We are encouraged and uplifted by this Word and its marvelous life-changing, life-saving results and now God wants us to share this word of wisdom and power. The amazing power and importance of this Word helps us overcome any barriers that we might have in sharing this message. The amazing power of the word helps us overcome doubt, or fear, or hesitation to share this message. The fear of rejection, even the divides of personal history, or on a larger scale race and society and cultural divides, are pushed aside when we consider how powerful and important this word of God is. Through this Word, God saved me and changed me and this gospel can save and change and bring marvelous life to others. Therefore, we proudly confess, ***“I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...”***

God enables us to share his words of salvation, as well as his words of wisdom and teaching and instruction with our children and with our friends, our neighbors, our relatives as he reminds us that when we share his Word it is more than a philosophy, or point of view, or a mere religion that we are sharing; this is the very word of God that we get to share. These are words that are powerful and life giving. His word is like a seed that might seem simple and small and insignificant to some, but we know it have the power to produce wonderful life. So receive the message with believing hearts and share the message in faith as well. As Christian fathers we instruct your children with these powerful words. As Christian men and women we reach out with the Word of God to neighbors and relatives and friends with confidence knowing that these words hold the very power of God. Remember how this miracle of faith in Nineveh was described. ***The Ninevites believed God.*** Jonah was just the messenger. It was God’s Word and His power in and behind that word that gave it power. As we look to share God’s Word and tell others about our God we will want to know God’s Word well, so that we can share it well and effectively, but above all let us be encouraged to share this life-giving Gospel that has the power to bring about such wonderful results. When we speak the word of God our Father to others we will know and believe that His word *does* have power and those words *can* make a wonderful difference. Those little bits of wisdom from God’s Word can and will sunk in, those words of rebuke from His word can and will make an impact, or those seeds of instruction can and will take root. There is power in the Word of God our Father and as his children we get to share his words of power and wisdom and salvation. Amen.