



Mennonite
Mission
Network

Mission Sunday

2020 resources

November is mission month. Help us celebrate what God is doing in the world and how God calls us to share the good news with others. Here are some tools to plan a Mission Sunday celebration. We hope you'll find them helpful.

Theme

Mission, racism, and repentance

Scripture text

Jonah 3:1-10

(All scripture quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise specified.)

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Introduction

Two plagues have erupted in 2020 — COVID-19 and the systemic injustice of racism. The killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and many others have exposed the United States' ugly history of terrorizing Black people to maintain the power and privilege of White people. Even though Christianity has made an indelible mark on American society, our legacy of racism is anything but Christian. On the contrary, the name "Christian" was first applied to Jews and Gentiles who were learning to overcome hostility and share life together through their faith in Jesus Christ. Mission, or the sharing of the good news of Jesus across cultures, lit the fire of the reconciliation of former enemies in one body. Indeed, Greek-speaking Jews from the Mediterranean and Africa ("Cyprus and Cyrene") were the first to tell the story of Jesus to the Syrian Gentiles among whom they were sent (Acts 11:19-26).

On the other hand, these were not the first Jews to cross land and sea to proclaim a message from God to the Gentiles. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God exhorted the Jews in Babylon "to seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you" (Jeremiah 29:7). And in the book of Jonah, God sends a Hebrew prophet to announce repentance to Nineveh. Nineveh was the great and glorious capital of Assyria, the mighty and merciless empire which destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in the 8th century before Christ. Like the Ninevites, the call "to turn from our evil ways and from the violence that is in our hands" confronts us who live in the shadow of 21st-century racism. Like Nineveh, the message of repentance comes not for our destruction, but that we might lament, turn, and be healed (Jonah 3:8-9).

With its focus on the mission of Jonah, may these materials inspire your worship and invigorate your witness to Jesus Christ, our hope in a diseased and divided world.

Worship resources

Sermon starters

1. In the text, the verb or noun form of the word for “word” (Hebrew: *dabar*) appears three times in relation to the city of Nineveh.

- In v. 2, the Lord tells Jonah to proclaim to Nineveh “the message that I tell you.”
- In v. 6, the king of Nineveh responds when “the news [“the word”] reached” him.
- In v. 10, God does not bring about “the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them.”

How would you describe the purpose of “the word” in this story? What is the reason “for which it was sent” (cf. Isaiah 55:10-11)?

2. The same word translated as “proclaim” or “cry out” appears four times in the text.

- Verse 2 includes two occurrences. The Lord tells Jonah to “proclaim to [Nineveh] the message [proclamation] that I tell you.” In other words, the Lord tells Jonah to “proclaim the proclamation” or to “cry the cry that I speak to you.”
- In v. 4, Jonah enters Nineveh and “cried out” the message to Nineveh.
- In response to Jonah’s proclamation (v. 4 above), “the people of Nineveh believed God” and “proclaimed a fast” (v. 5).

How would you describe the nature of the relationship between the proclamation of Jonah and the proclamation of the Ninevites? Is the one necessary for the other (cf. Romans 10:14-17)?

3. The verb translated as “get up” or “arise” appears twice in this text.

- In v. 2, The Lord tells Jonah to “get up” and “go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” This is “the second time” that the Lord has spoken to Jonah. The first time appears in chapter 1, v. 2a, where the Lord issued an identical command to Jonah—a word that Jonah disobeyed.
- In v. 6, when “the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.”

Is it significant that both the one who is sent with the word and the one who receives the word “get up” and turn toward God? Why or why not?

Worship songs and readings

Key

HWB = *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

SJ = *Sing the Journey*

SS = *Sing the Story*

Worship songs

- “Here, O Lord, your servants gather” HWB 7
- “Many and great, O God” HWB 35
- “Praise, my soul, the God of heaven!” HWB 63
- “We would extol thee” HWB 74
- “Praise God, the Source of life” HWB 95
- “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy” HWB 145
- “Marvelous grace of our loving Lord” HWB 151
- “Help us to help each other” HWB 362
- “Let there be light, Lord God” HWB 371
- “The church of Christ in every age” HWB 403
- “Move in our midst” HWB 418
- “Have thine own way” HWB 504
- “Open my eyes, that I may see” HWB 517
- “I need thee every hour” HWB 555
- “Jesus calls us here to meet him” SJ 3
- “Cantai ao Senhor (O sing to the Lord)” SJ 12
- “God of the Bible” SJ 27
- “Longing for light” SJ 54
- “How can I say” SS 117
- “Keep your lamps trimmed” SS 118
- “My soul cries out” SS 124

Responsive readings, litanies, and prayers

- HWB 717 Affirming Faith-Praying
- HWB 733 Praying
- HWB 750 Offering-Witnessing
- HWB 755 Witnessing
- HWB 830 Scriptures Isaiah 58:1-9b
- HWB 833 Scriptures Micah 4:1-4
- SJ 119 Gathering
- SJ 128 Confessing/Reconciling
- SJ 132 Confessing/Reconciling
- SJ 167 Sending
- SS 144 Responsive Reading
- SS 149 Responsive Reading
- SS 161 Call to Worship
- SS 164 Responsive Reading
- SS 169 Litany of Confession
- SS 176 Sending
- SS 196 Prayer
- SS 203 Affirming Faith

4. The verb translated as “turn”— to change direction or to convert — occurs three times in the text.

- In response to the word, the king’s decree is that all in Nineveh should “turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands” (v. 8).
- The king announces this decree in hope that God may “turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish” (v. 9).

- Finally, the king is proved right: “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it” (v. 10).

List all the characters in the story who “turn” or repent? What does repentance look like in this story? What actions are involved in repentance? What are the results of repentance?

Additional resources

Read D. L. Mayfield’s 2017 article in *Christianity Today*, “[Facing Our Legacy of Lynching](#),” about the history of lynching in the United States and the work of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and its founder, Bryan Stevenson, to create The Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. The Memorial provides tangible ways for visitors to carry its message of public confession and repentance for racial injustice to their home communities. Responding to the claim that people cannot repent of sins for which they were not personally present, Mayfield writes,

“In Daniel 9, Daniel confessed to sins that happened in another location, in another generation—yet he considered it important to include himself in the confession of those corporate sins.”

Discuss Mayfield’s portrayal of repentance. What opportunities exist in your own communities for acts of corporate confession, apology and repentance for violence and injustice? To learn more, join a Mennonite Mission Network **Civil Rights Learning Tour to Mississippi and Alabama**, including a visit to The Memorial for Peace and Justice. Stay tuned to Mission Network as plans develop for the trip, with a target date in the fall of 2021.

Offering suggestion

Support Christian peacebuilders in these and many other places through your prayers and donations to Mission Network.

- DOOR (Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection), a Mission Network partner, is a faith-based network of cities that provides opportunities for service, learning, and leadership development within the urban context. As a way to address racial injustice and combat the isolation that comes with coronavirus quarantines, they’ve expanded their programming to include virtual opportunities led by diverse voices, like the DOOR Teaching Collective. [Click here](#) to read the story.
- Read these recent articles of corporate confession and apology from Mission Network partners in [Korea](#) and [Australia](#).

Children’s story suggestion

Read the story card, “A Camp for Peace,” from our Mission Bank materials for [South Korea](#) found on our website. Invite children to collect an offering for one of the projects listed in these materials.

