

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**March 7, 2010**

**Mission to the Community**

Jonah 1:1-3 & 3:1-9

**Key verse: “The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth” (Jonah 3:5)**

Several years ago, a woman missionary took a furlough, along with her husband and family. The furlough came at the end of a particularly stressful time of missionary service. So, the missionary had been looking forward to this time away from the mission field to rest and recover.

For the furlough period, she and her family were going to have a nice townhouse in which to live. It had a patio, and the missionary was looking forward to decorating this patio and making it a place for quiet retreat. Just a few months into the furlough, however, some new neighbors moved in. This family played loud music day and night. They spewed a constant flow of loud obscenities, and totally disrupted the missionary’s peace.

She prayed that the Lord would give her a more loving attitude toward the obnoxious neighbors, but things seemed only to get worse. The crisis peaked one day when the missionary returned home to discover that the neighbors’ children had sprayed orange paint all over her beloved patio.

The missionary was furious. She tried to pray but found herself crying out, “I can’t love them; I hate them!”

...There once lived a prophet of God named Jonah, and God said to him: “Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me” (Jonah 1:2).

So Jonah, great man of God that he was, promptly got on a ship bound in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh. Why did he do that? Well, even God recognized Nineveh, capitol of Assyria, for its “wickedness.”

In a recent article for *Adult Bible Studies Illustrated*, Jean Gordon Wilcox and Branson Wilcox wrote: “The Assyrian army was notorious for its brutality, and the Assyrians themselves made sure their enemies knew about their reputation. Their bows, battering rams, and archers on horseback were also effective; but mutilation of prisoners, resettlement of whole populations, and a general rejoicing in butchery were what their victims told others about.”

So, perhaps we should not judge Jonah too harshly for his unsuccessful escape attempt. Still, it's a pretty ridiculous idea, when you think about it, to believe one can run away from God. Dr. Mortimer Adler, it is said, suddenly left a discussion group at a tea. Quite disgusted, Adler slammed the door behind him. Someone in the group tried to relieve the tension by saying, "Well, he's gone." The hostess then replied, "No, he isn't, That's a closet!" (from a *Christianity Today* article by Myron Augsburger).

Jonah didn't escape to a closet, but he did wind up in the belly of a great fish (Jonah 1:17). When God delivered Jonah, God gave him a second chance to go and preach to the people of Nineveh. And they responded! Wicked Nineveh heard Jonah's message and repented (Jonah 3:1-9).

As mentioned earlier, one can understand Jonah's reluctance to go and preach to Nineveh. It was a wicked, brutal city. But there was another reason that Jonah did not want to go. As a prophet of Israel, Jonah shared his people's misunderstanding of Israel's special relationship with God. Ancient Israel generally failed to understand that God had chosen it to be a blessing to all the nations.

Instead, Israel often wanted nothing to do with the "wicked" Gentiles. Israel often failed to see that it had been "blessed to be a blessing." How about us, you and me and the church today?

...Remember the woman missionary, struggling to love those "wicked" neighbors who were disturbing her peace? She came to realize that her bitterness toward her unruly neighbors was not pleasing to God. She prayed for God's help and, as she prayed, this Bible verse came to mind: "And beyond all these things put on love...." (Colossians 3:14).

In her heart she asked God, "Lord, how do I put on love?" Then she began to picture "putting on love" as something like putting on a coat. So she determined to do just that—she chose to wrap herself in the love of God!

Next, she made a list of what she would do if she really loved her irritating neighbors, and she began to do what she had listed. She baked cookies, she offered to baby-sit for free, she invited the mother over for coffee. And a beautiful thing happened. She began to understand her neighbors and to see them as a family that was extremely troubled, stressed, and broken. Over time, as she showed God's love to those neighbors, she gradually began to feel love for them.

Some months later, the neighbors moved—and the missionary cried! An unnatural, unusual kind of love had captured her heart—the love of Jesus.

(The missionary's story is told by Kent Hughes in Volume One of his commentary on Luke's gospel, *Crossway*, 1998).

Contact Michael at [msigler@fumcfwb.com](mailto:msigler@fumcfwb.com).)