

Getting Connected

April 19, 2020

PASTOR: We continue to miss everyone. We are very thankful to God and we're grateful for his mercy. He's been taking care of many of the needs of our people and so we rejoice. On the other hand, we continue to miss everyone. We miss the fellowship, the togetherness, the *koinonia*, if you will.

I heard a story the other day. This little girl was walking with her mother and she saw this puppy and it was really cute and she said to her mom, I know we have to stay 6 feet apart. And then she told her mom, I wish I had 6-foot-long arms.

I think sometimes when we miss connecting with each other we wish there were ways to get around things so today I'm going to talk about getting connected. I think that we've not only missed some of the connections we have as a church but we miss connecting. We miss connecting with each other.

I think we've tried. I think many of us have tried to stay connected. We have texted, we've made phone calls, we've sent e-mails, letters, we've done all of those type of things, but I think that

the fellowship of the local church is something that's on my mind and, perhaps, your mind as well. And I think there's some light of day coming. There's talk about bringing people back together again, and we're hoping this means our churches as well.

This disconnection from our churches, the people that we care about, and, perhaps for some, I'm concerned it's caused disconnecting even spiritually. I'm concerned that sometimes we, if possible, have tried to disconnect a little bit with God as well. Perhaps we get into a funk and we start thinking to ourselves, well, I'll pray later, I'll read my Bible later, I'll worship later, and we kind of get into these bad patterns so I'm concerned. As much as -- and I've mentioned this before -- as much as people are concerned about their physical well-being and staying disconnected from others, I fear that maybe disconnecting has caused some other problems in our lives, and I want to talk about getting connected today. We know that God wants us to connect.

I think about Jonah. I'm going to talk about Jonah today. He's been on my mind because Jonah was kind of a disconnected prophet. He tried his very best to disconnect from God, from being

obedient, and so I want to kind of entertain Jonah a little bit today. He's an interesting character. And if you have a Bible with you at home, perhaps this would be a good opportunity for you to open your Bibles to Jonah 1.

The first thing I would like to talk about is the struggle of disobedience, the struggle that we face sometimes not even with disobedience. Sometimes trials get in our way. Have you ever been disconnected from family or from your church because of sickness or trials? You had to leave and go somewhere. Perhaps you had a sickness and it put you on a bed of illness for a number of weeks.

Perhaps, on the other hand, too, this Covid-19 has disconnected us and we say, well, there's nothing we can do about it, but I want to entertain particularly the idea of disconnecting because of disobedience. I'm concerned as a pastor that when all of this is over people will get into bad patterns. People will have grown cool and cold and, perhaps, apathetic towards the Lord.

I'm hoping actually, instead, that people will warm to the Lord Jesus Christ, that during this time that their worship has been sweet, that they've gotten into the word of God and they have said to

themselves, I will spend time with the Lord Jesus and this has been maybe a wonderful, refreshing time of spirituality, so I'm hoping to that end.

In Jonah 1 we understand that God never intended for his people to function alone, and that includes particularly when we talk about the church and staying connected as Christians is certainly an act of obedience.

I remind you, before we get into Jonah 1, that in Hebrews 10:25 -- and you say, I know all about Hebrews 10:25, but we can't do Hebrews 10:25 because the government has asked us to distance ourselves socially. We do not want to get other people sick in our church. We've tried hard to make sure that we ensure the safety, the well-being of each other. But Hebrews 10:25 says we're not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. That's a tough one, isn't it, right now.

So we miss it. We want to get back connected again. We want to obey God. This is actually an act of obedience when we assemble ourselves together. So when it says not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, it really is not an option. It is a command from scripture. Do not do this. Do not forsake the assembling of

yourselves together. Do not disconnect yourselves.

Yes, we understand about sickness. Yes, we understand this virus historically is getting in the way. This is something unheard of. But it says this, and this is a matter of obedience. It says, as is the manner of some. Some people will say, I don't feel like it, I'm disinterested, or I have better things going on.

Instead, we're to exhort one another. By the way, that's part of our connecting with each other. We exhort each other. We encourage. We urge each other to do something. Please do this. Don't forget to do this. And one of the things that I do as a pastor is I urge from the pulpit: Please, please, do this; I beg you even to do this.

And it says, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. Maybe with all the troubles and trials that maybe are on the horizon we need to encourage and exhort each other all the more.

Well, God ordained the local church, we might come together. That's an act of obedience. I'm hoping -- and I'm starting this off so you have the idea of the premise where we're basing this on. I am looking forward to connecting again. I am looking forward to connecting with our local church.

This is fine, doing these video sermons on the Web, but certainly it isn't the same as the local church. It's not the church meeting together. But we're doing the best that we can. We want to reach out to each other and we urge people to keep connecting as our church and maybe other people from other churches. And if, perhaps, you do not obey this particular command to be part of a local church and to attend a local church, we urge you to be that person and so that's part of scripture.

Well, I want to talk about Jonah, I mentioned to you. Jonah was the disconnected prophet. So let's take a look at Jonah 1 for a few minutes this morning.

It says, Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

I want to mention something right off the bat. Do you notice God is the great connector? God is always reaching out. God makes appeals to us. God, His hand is always stretched out reaching to people. That's what He did when He saved us. You say, oh, no, no, I reached out to him. Well, it seems there is that two-way street -- in some sense

there is -- but I want you to understand that God is the great connector. He is the one who makes appeals to us. And so when we have salvation, God, through his Holy Spirit when we hear his word, when we hear the truth of the gospel, we respond then, if you would. We want to connect back in faith, so to speak.

So God is the one reaching out and He reaches out to Jonah and He's connecting with him and He's telling Jonah that He has this great commission for him to do. He's to go to this great city, to Nineveh. He's to go and connect to Nineveh. Connect with me now, the Lord is telling him. Now I want you to go to Nineveh. Cry out against it. Tell them they need to repent, in essence.

But Jonah arose to flee. What did Jonah do? He immediately started to disconnect, didn't he? Isn't it something? Isn't that so much like people? They always think they have a better plan than God, that they rationalize these things.

Jonah disconnects. It said, in fact, that he made a physical action, a direct response to disobey. He arose to flee. He got up and he fled and he went to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. What does that mean? He went in the opposite

direction. Sometimes that happens with people. That's why we exhort people, we urge people to connect.

So it says this: He fled to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Foolish of him to think that. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare.

He keeps disobeying. Do you notice that? He pays the fare. He flees. Notice all these action words that he does. He arises; he flees; he goes to Joppa; he wants to go the opposite way; he wants to disconnect from God and His plan as much as he possibly can.

So he finds this ship. He pays the fare. He's willing to pay to get out of there. And he went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. If we miss the whole thing, it says, from the presence of the Lord. He wants to disconnect.

It says this: But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea. Don't miss it. God does send disastrous things sometimes for his own purposes and his plans. A mighty tempest on the sea so that the ship was about to be broken up.

It sounds like a pretty big trial if you



ask me. All these sailors aboard, the ship is taking passengers, and Jonah is on the ship and the tumult is of such a substance that the whole boat is about ready to be wrecked. It's about ready to go down into the deep.

It says, Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god. They were pagans. You have to understand. When you start seeing sailors crying out and being this upset, you know it's really dangerous. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. They tell you why. Help the ship stay afloat. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, laid down, and was fast asleep. Isn't that something? He doesn't care anymore. Just get me out of here.

So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper?"

That doesn't sound like any kind of an encouraging word to me. Does it to you? He's rebuking him. He's letting him have it. There's sarcasm as well: Sleeper?

He says, get up. "Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." They are grasping at straws, whatever it takes to keep them going.

So they said to one another, "Come, let's cast lots." It's funny that they did this lot casting even, these pagans. "That we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us." God, in his providence, used even these pagans' casting of lots. It's kind of like flipping coins. Kind of like, you know, I'm going to -- heads I will do this, tails I will not.

Well, they cast lots. So God used it providentially, and they cast lots and guess who it fell on. It fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation?" What do you do? "And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" They're giving him a thorough examination trying to figure out why he is the cause of this terrible storm and the sinking of their ship.

So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; I fear the Lord." That's kind of true. He tells them that's his God, but he didn't fear him enough to obey, unfortunately.

He says, "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." All of this is true.

Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and

said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, and they found out it was because he was trying to disconnect. He was trying -- God had told him to do something and he did the opposite. He disobeyed.

Verse 11 in this passage: Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" -- the sea was growing even worse, more tempestuous.

He said to them, "Pick me up, throw me into the sea." Isn't that -- you know, for wanting to be so disobedient -- we're not going to get into all the reasons. Some of them, basically, were for patriotic reasons on his part. He didn't want to tell the people of Assyria and their biggest city to -- how they could repent, and that was part of the problem. Actually, the majority of the problem for them. So -- but now he's brave enough to say, Toss me in the water.

He says if you do that, "the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not. The sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. They're about

ready to go down. Therefore they cried out to the Lord and said -- I don't want you to miss this. Okay? Don't miss this. Look who connects to God. After all, these are pagans. Strangely enough, Jonah connects the living God with pagans. In essence, he has given to them the truth that this is God himself who is at work. He causes them, in essence, to believe.

They cried out to the Lord and said, "We pray, O Lord, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You." So they gave up. They picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea. The sea ceased from its raging.

Guess who or what Jonah connected with. He connected with the sea, didn't he? Sometimes we think that we can run away from God.

Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, because what happened? The sea calmed down. All of a sudden it went from an enormous storm, the ship ready to go down, to the calm seas. But notice -- you say, I don't know about these men, if they really believed. Notice verse 16: Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and they took vows. Very serious about all of

this.

Meanwhile, guess what else? Jonah keeps making connections of the wrong kind. He connected to a ship he shouldn't have went to, he connected to the sea, and guess now what he's going to connect to in verse 17? A big fish. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

By the way, by the time you get to the end of chapter 2, the great fish had enough of Jonah, wanted to disconnect from him. We're told at the end of chapter 2 he vomited Jonah out on the land. Isn't it interesting?

Well, Jonah disobediently disconnected with the Lord back in verse 3. Jonah didn't want to connect with Nineveh. Jonah didn't want to give them the truth. Jonah didn't want to tell the people of Nineveh to repent, to turn to God.

Don't you think it was rather foolish of Jonah to think he could actually disconnect with God, to flee the presence of God? I think sometimes we think that way, don't you, that -- we know it, that we can't do it, but somehow we think that we can get away from God. You really can't, you know. You really can't.

I'm reminded -- and he should have known himself, Jonah, of Psalm 139:7-12. It says this: Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there.

It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if Jonah went to Tarshish. God's there. You can't disconnect from him.

If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea -- hey, Jonah should have been able to relate to that -- even there Your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; and the darkness and the light are both alike to You.

We that are saved, one of the great things about our salvation is that we are eternally connected to the Lord. Isn't that wonderful? It says in scripture, no wise will I cast you out. Scripture says this, that no man or nothing shall pluck you out of my hand. We are connected forevermore in the very hand of God. When you know

Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are eternally connected.

I'm very thankful for the passages that we are reading. I'm thankful for the passages that remind us of our salvation. I'm so glad for the gospel today that says that we are bound to the Lord Jesus forevermore.

The Bible tells us that Jesus went to the cross of Calvary for sinners just like us and he died as our substitute on the cross of Calvary. We call people to repent of their sin. We're all sinners. Scripture makes that clear. We invite people to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Last week we talked about the resurrection. Jesus died, was buried, and he rose again from the dead victorious. Death couldn't hold him. And so we're thankful that we have a Savior who has risen and we eternally belong to him. What a wonderful salvation that is. And so despite viruses and separations, we always belong to Jesus Christ.

Jonah was rather foolish to think that he could flee from the presence of God, but that is how sometimes we think. We think that somehow we can move away from the living God, and that's not possible. So, yes, he got disconnected from the

sailors in the boat but connected to the water and the big fish, didn't he?

I want to talk just for a moment about the fact that God is the persistent connector. Don't you love that about the Lord? We, with all of our weaknesses and stupidity and our foolishness, sometimes we're like Jonah and we try to do things that are disobedient to God. Maybe God won't see us, maybe God won't mind if we somehow disobey him for a season, we don't do what he says, but I'm so thankful that God is the persistent connector.

God, in verses 4-9 in Jonah, He sent this big storm, this big storm. He sent trouble Jonah's way. Why did he do that? He's telling Jonah, number one, you can't get away from me, and number two, he continues to connect with Jonah. He continues to connect with him to get his attention.

In our case maybe a virus that persists around us is meant to get our attention. Maybe it's meant to get the world's attention. Maybe it's meant for preachers around the world and pastors to give the gospel of Jesus Christ out that people will hear it online and they'll say, you know, I'm bored. I need something to listen to. Maybe I will listen to this pastor, that pastor. And God, who is the great



connector, might persist in getting ahold of the ear of people in giving them the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why we cry out and we tell people you need the Lord. You need Jesus Christ. You need forgiveness of your sin. There is a provision in the living God.

You see, the sailors figured out the problem, that Jonah was the cause because he was trying to disconnect from God. Why did you do that? But God connected with him. It's one of the wonderful things that's easily missed in this passage, in verses 14-16. They're connecting with the Lord.

I love it. I love it when I see how pagans like this connected. And we're not a whole lot better. Oh, I always believed in God. Listen. We had to come to a place in our life when God really connected with us and we needed to cry out to him and repent and say, yes, I'm a sinner, I confess that, and I desperately need Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I am so thankful that He, indeed, died on that cross for my sins and He rose again victorious.

In their case, Old Testament people, I will not be surprised someday to see these sailors in glory someday because they seem to believe. They seem to believe.

So God is the persistent connector. He continues to persist with Jonah. Jonah could have drowned in that water and God could have used another prophet. God could have used another means to reach the people of Nineveh, but do you know what? He said, I'm going to use Jonah. Isn't that a persistent connection, to continue to say, I'm going to use Jonah?

Maybe God wants to use you. Maybe he's continuing to persist to try to connect with you. Maybe you are a Christian today and He wants to use you in a wonderful way, and you continue to say, no, no, somebody else, somebody else, somebody else. Maybe in his persistence He wants you.

And so what did God do? A great fish swallows him up. That's persistence. Then he spits him out on the land.

One more thing. I want to talk about your need to connect today. Your need to connect. First of all, I think you need to connect with God. Your fellowship with God is important, Christian. If you're unsaved today and you're listening to this, cry out to God. Cry out with all of your heart to the living God for salvation.

Scripture is very clear about the

importance of fellowship with God and with others. I was thinking about 1 John 1. Verse 3 says, that which we have seen and heard we declare to you. John the apostle writes, I'm declaring this to you that you also may have fellowship with us, this *koinonia* we mentioned, this togetherness, this communion, this one another.

One others are so important in scripture. That's why the local church is ordained by God. This is God's plan. God has a plan. He never meant for you to fly solo. He never meant for you to be the Lone Ranger. He never meant for you to do your own thing out there somewhere and say, well, it's my life. Well, I want you to understand something. If you're a Christian today, God wants to use you. God has a plan for you. He is persistently trying to connect with you.

And we're told in verse 3: Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ.

How's that fellowship going today? I love that vertical fellowship. Love that vertical fellowship. Talking to the Lord; talking to the Lord; God laying things on our hearts through his word; God laying things on our hearts for other

people; wanting to fellowship; wanting to serve; wanting to do these things for the sake of the Lord; wanting to connect. So we think about this vertical fellowship with the Lord.

We sing these old hymns, when we walk with the Lord in the light of his Word. Fellowship. Don't you want to talk to the Lord? I think about that quite often. All of this quiet people are having, are you fellowshiping with the living God? Are you connecting with him? He's there. He persists and is connecting with you.

Are you connecting with him? Are you making efforts to pray? To read the word? To obey His word? Are you trying to worship Him?

We're told back in 1 John 1:4, These things we write to you that your joy may be full. It's so hard, you know. I find it kind of boring in doing all these things. John says your joy may be full if you have fellowship with the Lord. That is your desire; that is your heart; that is your connecting presence; this is your fulfillment. This will give you fullness of joy to contemplate, to meditate, to think of his wonder and his glory. It's a good thing.

This is the message which we have heard

from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, it says we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we obey, we persist in wanting to connect with the Lord, with God's people, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

One of the truths of your salvation is this: I want to fellowship with other Christians. If you have no desire to fellowship with other Christians, that may indicate you've never been saved so we want you to connect. We want you to connect. We want your hearts to be correct with the Lord, with other people as well that love Jesus Christ.

So fellowship is also important, not only with the Lord but with other Christians, so we seek ways to connect, even, perhaps, during these trials that we're facing right now. It's soon going to be over, we hope. Then we need to get back with God's people. We need to be reminded that it takes effort, it takes obedience to connect.

I'll do this someday. No, let's start; let's persist; let's connect; let's do this with the

Lord and with God's people. We have a need to connect.

We need also, with this connecting, we need to evangelize; we need to disciple; we need to help; we need our local church; we need to preach; we need to teach; we need to comfort; we need to guide people; all the one others. God calls us to be connected to people. May God lay in our hearts to connect like we never have before.

Heavenly Father, we pray for all those that are listening that the spirit of God himself might persist in connecting in our lives. We thank you, oh Lord, that you are a God who continues to pursue and to work and to minister even in hearts. Help us even today as we hear Your word again and we are reminded of an obstinate character like Jonah who tried to disobey.

Oh Lord, we look forward to the time when the churches can get back together, and we look forward to that wonderful fellowship that we have in Christ Jesus. Until then, may we continue to enjoy our time with you, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.