Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“There is something greater than Jonah here” (Luke 11:32).

Jon 3:1-10; *Lk 11:29-32*

Just what is the sign of Jonah? Because the imagery in the story is so compelling, we think of Jonah going down into the belly of the whale, which then becomes a sign of Jesus going down into death and then rising up again.

But it seems fairly obvious from the context of Jesus' response to the crowds that the sign of Jonah was simply his preaching, at which the Ninevites suddenly and dramatically repented. Jesus hears the people clamoring for some spectacular sign that will convince them to repent. They will receive no such sign. Without repentance they were bringing down judgment on themselves.

The contrast between Jonah and Jesus could not be greater. Jonah was a reluctant prophet who first ran away from God. He does not want the Ninevites to repent and be saved because they were Israel's most hated enemy. To be sure he would fail, Jonah barely whispers his message in the marketplace. But the King of Assyria orders the whole nation to put on sackcloth and ashes. It was an unlikely story, almost a joke, that such an arrogant, powerful kingdom like Assyria would repent. But they did, and Nineveh was saved.

Jesus holds them up as willing to repent, while Israel, God's chosen people, refused to do as much, despite God's many blessings. In contrast, Jesus had preached his message, worked many miracles and made a compelling case for repentance as the path to life. Still, the people did not believe him. There will be no other sign than this story of Jonah. If the call to life is not enough, what will some spectacular warning or celestial show accomplish?

On Ash Wednesday, we heard the simple message, "Repent and hear good news." This is the sign of Jonah. Do we see it, and will we change our hearts and be saved?

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