

First Lutheran Church



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Worship 10:00 am

Weekly Newsletter

3.26.26

Pastor's Ponderings

Mercy For an Unfinished People

This reflection is the conclusion of the Wednesday Lenten series on Jonah and is based (mostly) on Jonah 4.

In Major League Baseball, for over a hundred years, you lived with the call on the field—part of the game. Balls and strikes, safe or out—you could argue, you could kick dirt, you could get right up into the umpire's face and scream and yell (and get tossed from the game)—but at the end of the day, the umpire's word was final.

But not anymore. Now, managers can challenge calls. Even balls and strikes are subject to review.

It doesn't matter what it looked like in real time.

It doesn't matter how convinced the umpire was.

It doesn't matter how loudly the home crowd boos.

The replay doesn't lie.

Jonah—upon hearing that God has changed his mind about the calamity he had said he would bring upon the awful, evil, hated Ninevites—asks argues, kicks dirt, gets in God's face and screams:

"O Lord! Is not this what I said to you while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning!" (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah is asking for a replay. Ok, Jonah. Let's look at the tape. What did you say to God when you were still in your home country?

"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah 1:1-3)

Doesn't seem Jonah said anything. He goes down to Joppa. Down to Tarshish. Down to the hold of a ship. Away from the presence of the Lord.

The replay doesn't lie. Jonah lies, but the replay does not. Jonah says nothing to the Lord while he is in his own country. He does not speak to the Lord, argue with the Lord, pray to the Lord. He just flees from the Lord—even choosing to be flung into the depths of the sea rather than utter a single word to the Lord.

In baseball, replay reveals the truth—but in Jonah's case, just like in our lives, replay doesn't resolve the argument. Because even when the truth is clear, our hearts—and our minds—are clouded and confused.

And yet, for Jonah, something has changed—spending three days in the belly of a fish can do that to a person. When we first meet Jonah, the replay shows no conversation, no prayer, no protest. He simply runs from God. But now, he argues, he lashes out, he accuses God, "I told you this from the start! I knew that you are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Jonah 4:2, AT) It's ugly. It's only half true. But it is the beginning—of conversation, of dialogue, of prayer, of relationship. The beginning of something that, for Jonah—and for us—is unfinished.

Because Jonah is unfinished. Just as we are unfinished. We are unfinished because our God, who Jonah knows to be merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, will forever pursue us. For us—and for our neighbors.

Jonah boards the ship—God pursues. Jonah sinks into oblivion—God pursues. Jonah, in his burning anger, asks that God take his life—God pursues. "Is it right for you to burn with anger?"

Jonah says nothing—again—and instead flees from the city. He grabs a bucket of popcorn and waits to see what will happen. Will God destroy the Ninevites? Or will this merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness God chicken out? Will God side with Jonah’s enemies?

God, once again, pursues Jonah, this time appointing a plant to grow up and give shade to Jonah. Jonah loves the plant. And then God appoints a worm destroy the plant. Jonah hates that the plant is dead, especially when God appoints a “sultry east wind” and the sun to beat down on his head. Jonah’s burning anger is renewed, and he speaks to God yet again, “It is better for me to die than to live!” (Jonah 4:8)

God persists. God pursues. “So, you’re angry about the plant, huh? The one that I caused to grow. The plant that existed for only a single day.” Jonah, as belligerent as ever, but still speaking, pouts, “Yes, angry enough to die!” (Jonah 4:9)

God rebukes, “But should I not care about this great city, Nineveh, and these 120,000 people, who don’t know their right hand from their left—and, of course, also many animals?”

And the story of Jonah ends here.

No conclusion. No resolution. And no repentance—not from Jonah. Just an unanswered question: “Should I not care about Nineveh? (And it’s many animals?)”

Jonah knows the answer. He admitted as much in saying, “That’s why I never wanted to go there in the first place—because you would relent!” The question is, will he stop arguing and swearing and kicking up dirt—will he accept the call on the field? Or will he once again quit, running once again from the Ninevites, and their animals. And from God? We simply don’t know.

And really, it doesn’t matter what Jonah does because when we watch the replay, we see ourselves in this wayward prophet. “Should I not care about Nineveh? And it’s animals?” This is our question to answer, too.

And we, like Jonah, know the answer. God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

So, when we are called to Nineveh—when we are called to love the enemy—will we turn tail and run? Or will we enter into conversation with God? Will we pray? Argue? Kick up dirt and throw a fit?

Jonah’s failure here goes beyond his anger. It is his silence—and his flight. But in the end, our unfinished friend speaks. In anger, yes. But he is conversing with God. God has called Jonah—just as he calls us—to the slow, painful, unfinished work of reconciliation—work that refuses to choose between justice and mercy, but holds them together.

Justice that names what is broken. Mercy that refuses to let brokenness be the end of the story—because this story, our story, is unfinished.

There is mercy for Ninevah—and its animals. Mercy for Jonah. And us. And—“them,” the enemy. But not instead of justice—in the middle of the unfinished. Because God is not yet finished. And neither are we. Still resisting. Still learning. Still being pursued. And still being loved—by a God who refuses to give up on us. Or on “them.”

The call stands. Mercy—for us. For “them.” For a people still unfinished. Amen.



If you have comments or questions, would like to talk, or desire a visit, please call or e-mail either me or the church office.

Peace,
Pastor Shawn Schneider
937-726-3831 or
pastor@flcgalion.com

This Week at First

Worship: Palm Sunday

First Lesson: Isaiah 50:4-9a

Second Lesson:

Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel Lesson: Matthew 26:14—27:66

In-Person Worship

Sunday – March 29, 2026

8:30pm - St. Paul Lutheran Worship

10:00am - First Lutheran Worship

Tuesday - March 31, 2026

7:00pm - Prayer Shawl Meeting

Thursday - April 2, 2025

7:00pm - Maundy Thursday Service at FLC

Friday - April 3, 2026

7:00pm - Good Friday Service at FLC



We are praying for:

Rod Mitton, Clint & Barb Howe, Devin Mosen, Chuck Robinson, Jack Harpst, Sr., Tammy Smith, Doug May, Linda Kahler and Ed Naufzinger

Long Term Prayer List: Pastor Tim Keeler, Joe Beaty, Kyle Baughn, Marlene Leme, Chloe, Joyce Corwin, AJ Rinaldi, Kaden Allerdig, Haylee Lilly, Scott, Sandy Alley, Jean Henry, Tina Fuson, Ed Smith, Bobbie Jo Seighman

Homebound, Assisted Living, or Limited

Mobility: Jack Harpst Jr, Jay DeNise, Millie Haas, Brenda Haas, Janet Hammermiller, Phyllis Straka, Fred Watkins, Joyce Shearer and Patty Owen

To add someone to our prayer list or prayer chain, call the church office or email us at pastor@flcgalion.com

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.



Denise Grandy - April 1

Barb Howe - April 3

Julie Sargel - April 4



Mike & Julie Keyes - March 31



Grief Share is a 13 week, Christ-centered, biblically-based program that focuses on grief topics associated with the death of a loved one.

Grief Share Sessions continues on Monday, March 30, 2026, from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. The sessions will be at St. Paul United Methodist Church located at 746 Cherry St., Galion. For more information and registration, call Mary at (740)-396-2522, Cathy at (419)-571-5948 or the church office at (419)-468-4557.

Grief is not something you suddenly get over, forget or move on from. Too often, people tend to tuck their grief away instead of allowing it to do its intended work. Whether your bereavement experience is recent or not so recent, Grief Share is an opportunity to be around people in a confidential and understanding environment where you will find encouragement, comfort, and help in grieving the death of a spouse, child, parent, sibling, other family members or a friend.



Psalm Reading

Psalm 31:9-16

⁹Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;

my eye wastes away from grief,
my soul and body also.

¹⁰**For my life is spent with sorrow,
and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.**

¹¹I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;
those who see me in the street flee from me.

¹²**I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;**

I have become like a broken vessel.

¹³For I hear the whispering of many —
terror all around! —
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.

¹⁴**But I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, "You are my God."**

¹⁵My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and
persecutors.

¹⁶**Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.**