

GOD SAYS YOU CAN BEGIN AGAIN!*

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh..." (Jonah 3:1-2).

Last week at a missionary retreat in Kenya, Katy and I found ourselves sitting with a couple who had been faithfully serving the Lord for years near the Somali border. They were pouring out their lives in a very difficult and dangerous area, seeking to evangelize a resistant Muslim people group. We were sobered as we realized the level of commitment and devotion required for such a ministry. We asked them to tell us their story.

Speaking of their lives before they responded to God's call, the wife described herself as a "women's libber." She told about a tragic divorce and of an on-going battle with depression. The husband then described his earlier life as an Episcopal priest in a liberal U.S. church famous for its support of the homosexual agenda. He told how pornography had almost destroyed his marriage. They both wept as they spoke of a daughter attending a Bible College in Europe who is secretly living with a non-believer whom she plans to marry after graduation.

When the conversation ended, Katy and I sat there stunned. This was not the story we had expected to hear! As we hugged them, they both seemed a bit embarrassed about revealing so many skeletons in their closets. But we only hugged them tighter. Far from being scandalized, we were awed at the power of grace to redeem and restore. *But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more (Romans 5:20).*

It amazes me who God chooses to be in his family. And it astounds me even more to realize who he selects to be his ambassadors and preachers! Our friends in Kenya remind me again of the story of Jonah. What a basket case! This rascal spent the first part of his life running from God. But though Jonah had given up on God, God had not given up on Jonah and sent him a "whale-o-gram" to get his attention! There's nothing quite like sitting in gastric juice for three days at the bottom of the ocean to bring someone to a point of surrender. Finally, Jonah humbled himself, confessed his sin and agreed to do whatever God asked. Jonah's change of heart made the fish sick who promptly vomited him up (prophets often have that effect on people.) Then God spoke to him again: *Arise, go to Nineveh (1:1-2; 3:1-2).* This time Jonah obeyed and God used the reluctant prophet to bring about one of the greatest revivals in history! Thank God for second chances.

Is there some area in your life where you are resisting God's will? Are you running from what he wants you to do? Don't wait for God to send you a "whale-o-gram!" Humble yourself. Surrender your will to his. Today he is offering you a second chance (II Cor. 6:2, Heb. 3:15). I can't promise that tomorrow he will offer you a third.

Pastor Stan

* Offer good today only.