



[Pastor Keith GeRue](#)

Sermon for Lent 4 Midweek
April 2, 2025

40 for Life

Jonah: Repentance for Life

Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 13:1-9

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

40 days and 40 nights.

That's how long Nineveh had. The same number of days the rain pelted Noah and the ark. The same number of days Moses spent on Mount Sinai. The same number of days for their passage from death to life. **Forty days**, Jonah cried out, **and Nineveh will be overthrown**. Which probably meant the people would be plundered, the city would be burned, and all the living put to the sword. *In forty days*.

What would you have done?

What would you do if tomorrow you went to see the doctor and you were told you only had 40 days to live? What would you do?

What would you do if we received a message from a terrorist group that in 40 days Washington would be nuked. What would you do?

What did you do when we began the 40 days of this Lenten season?

If you were given 40 days, what would you do?

I think we would try to save our lives. If the doctor told you you only had 40 days to live, we'd find another doctor to see if there was something that could be done to prolong our days. If we were told there would be a terrorist attack, we would get out of here, away from here, to someplace safe.

Perhaps thoughts like that crossed the minds of the people of Nineveh, too. 40 days, huh? Okay! We have 40 days to reinforce the walls of the city. 40 days to get ready to fight. 40 days to prepare for a siege. Or, 40 days to flee. But that is not what they did. Because the one who would overthrow them was not a nation with an army, but a God - the God of Israel. And how do you get ready to save your life from God? **You repent.**

That's what the people of Nineveh did. Even the king! **From the greatest of them to the least of them**, we heard, they fasted and put on sackcloth. The king even called for the beasts to participate in this fasting and sackcloth! But not only this, but for all people to **call out mightily to God**. To



[Pastor Keith GeRue](#)

Sermon for Lent 4 Midweek

April 2, 2025

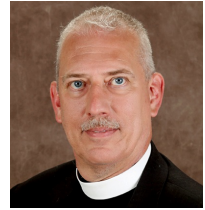
pray. To beseech His mercy. And not only to repent with their mouths but with their deeds - ***everyone turned from his evil way and from the violence that was in his hands.*** At the preaching of the Word of the Lord, Nineveh was transformed from a den of iniquity into a chapel of fasting, prayer, and repentance. They did not know, but they hoped, that God would relent; that they would not perish.

That's quite remarkable, that change. But perhaps *even more* remarkable is God's willingness to relent and forgive. *Which He did.* And though we did not read it tonight, that God did not destroy them made Jonah mad! Jonah did not want them to be forgiven, which is why he tried so hard not to go there in the first place. Jonah did not think they deserved to be forgiven. They were too evil. Too far gone. *There are limits, you know!*

We think we know, anyway. Peter famously asked about that once, remember that? *Lord, how many times do I have to forgive* (Matthew 18:21)? But you're quite right, Jonah, in this regard - the people of Nineveh did not deserve to be forgiven, no matter how long they repented, no matter how greatly they fasted and prayed. But neither do you deserve forgiveness, Jonah! And neither do we, O Christians. Do you think they were worse sinners than us? Or were those Galileans whose blood were mingled with their sacrifices worse sinners? Or were those upon whom the tower in Siloam fell worse sinners? Are those illegal immigrants worse sinners? Are murderers worse sinners? Rioters? Looters? Those who lie, cheat, and steal to get ahead? *Who are* the really bad sinners in our day and age, in our world today? You know. **They are sitting in these pews tonight.** For as Jesus said, ***unless you repent . . . Not unless the people of Nineveh become like you, but unless you become like the people of Nineveh! . . . you will all likewise perish.***

And so, Lent. 40 days and 40 nights for us to be like the people of Nineveh. To repent of who we are and what we have done. **40 days from death to life.** But here is where we are different than the people of Nineveh and will never be like the people of Nineveh: *they did not know* if the Lord would relent and forgive them. *We do.* We know. Not only because we have the book of Jonah and so know how the story turned out, but because we have the books of the prophets and the apostles which tell us how the story turns out. That God, in fact, did not relent of the disaster He decreed because of our sin, **but poured it out on His Son instead.** Jesus and His cross became the barren, fruitless tree that was cut down. And in its place a new tree was planted. A fruit-*full* tree. A new tree of life. Nineveh was a great city, three days journey in breadth. But the three-day journey Jesus took from death to life was even greater, and provided an even greater city for us - the City of God.

Knowing this, then, the season of Lent is our 40 days of repentance. *Our* 40-day journey from death to life. To repent not just with our words, but also with our deeds. To turn away from the bad practices and bad habits that have wormed their way into our hearts and minds and lives, and confess. And confessing, rely on the mercy of God. And relying on the mercy of God, turn to the



[Pastor Keith GeRue](#)

Sermon for Lent 4 Midweek

April 2, 2025

cross, where we see that mercy in full display - the Lamb of God, the Son of God, who laid down His life to give us life. For *Jesus sinners doth receive* (LSB #609). Jesus sinners doth forgive.

So, 40 days. On the one hand, that's not very many days. On the other hand, it's hard to maintain a Lenten discipline for that long, through all 40 days. But realize, you may not have 40 days of life left. *Man knows not his time* (Ecclesiastes 9:12). And our times are in His hands, the hands of our Father. **But there is no better place to be.** The hands of the world? unpredictable and unreliable. Kind one moment and angry the next. Helping one moment and betraying the next. But the hands of our Father always the same. *Merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love* (Psalm 86:15). Nineveh found that out. Sadly, later they fell away and were overthrown.

But for us, every year the call goes out. The call of a Jonah, the call of a Joel, the call of a John the Baptist, calling us to repentance. Calling us to 40 days for life. To once again *cast off the sins which weigh us down and cling so closely, and fix our eyes on Jesus* (Hebrews 12:1-2). That we be fruitful branches again. That the repentance and discipline of Lent bring us to the joy and life of Easter and be the dying and rising we learn to live everyday. Everyday turning to and relying on our good and gracious God. That we not perish, but have eternal life.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.