

THE REFORMED CHURCH OF CANAJOHARIE  
CANAJOHARIE, NY



LENTEN DEVOTIONS  
IN  
COVID TIME

Volume 1

ASH WEDNESDAY

You Are Dust

READ: Psalm 90: 1-6

“Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind.” This was a line from one of the most popular songs of the ‘70’s. Instead of an ode to love, or parties, or both, it was a sober assessment of the shortness and insignificance of life. We are born, we grow, we reach adulthood, we make our plans, we strive, we find that we are never quite able to get it all done, and then we decline and die. And what is left? After some centuries in the grave, we become dust. And for God, it is all in the blink of an eye.

Isaiah says that human life is like new grass, which springs up in the morning and withers in the noonday sun. The snowman is built, and can be as tall as its maker can reach, but in a short while the sun comes out and it melts away. The fruit fly emerges, lives for a day or two, and then passes. Yet, its life is a serious business to itself as it goes about its business, eating, mating, bearing eggs and dying. In its own way it exhibits the handiwork of God. It is not without its own worth, but its lifespan is short to us.

As is ours to God. We also exhibit the handiwork of God. We are precious in his sight. We have our purposes, we reflect the image of God. But we are dust. The wind of God blows and we ourselves are blown away. And he remains. We are not the center, we are not eternal. God is. If he wills it, we live, if not we pass and the place we were does not remember us. Depressing? Maybe, but important to remember, as we live through this time of uncertainty, disease, and confusion. We are not in charge, God is. And that is a comfort in a world of uncertainty, when something as basic as washing your hands is of great importance.

PRAYER: Eternal God, who gives us all life and takes it away, who is from everlasting to everlasting, we remember that our time is short and our life is fragile. We thank you that you value us who are dust to you. Help us make the most of the days we have, and establish the work of our hands, we pray. Amen.

SONG: “Dust in the Wind” by Kansas - Call it up on whatever device you use.

## WEEK ONE

### Exile

February 18- Thursday

Exile From Eden

READ: Genesis 31-7, 22-24

The story of human beings is one of exile. It starts with the first of us. We lived in paradise, in perfect relationship with God and with each other. But we wanted more. We wanted to be our own gods, to make our own decisions and decide what is right and wrong for ourselves. And the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was just hanging there. All it took was a little encouragement.

So we ate, and have continued to eat for all of human history. And in so doing we broke our lives in paradise, in Eden. We also broke our relationship with God, and with each other. We could not stay in the place where we were known fully, where we could not be alone with our sin, our pain, our resentment. We could not remain. We had to leave. Otherwise we would eat from the tree of life, and remain forever in our misery, in a paradise which was no longer paradise, but everlasting torment over what we had lost.

So God put us out. In the severest, most painful mercy we can imagine, we were sent out of the garden, away from the tree of life, away from paradise, away from the glory of God. And we became exiles. We cannot get back on our own. And we are haunted by the memory of the way it was meant to be. In a soft whisper of wind, in the colors of the sunset, in the innocent laugh of a baby, we can hear the call of our home. We long for it, but we have to wander until we can find our way home. We cannot find the way. We wait for One to show us.

PRAYER: Father, we want to come home, but we cannot find the way. We pray you will help us know the way home. Forgive me for breaking the gift of being with you. Amen

SONG:

“Can’t Find My Way Home”

Blind Faith

February 19- Friday

Exile From God

READ: Genesis 3:8-11

We usually think of being exiled from the Garden of Eden as being a sign of God's wrath against us. Many have an image of God as being stern, foreboding, ready to crush us in his uncontrollable rage at our sin. The account in Genesis gives us a slightly different picture. As an expression of God being in ongoing relationship with the first people we find the image of God walking in the garden. It is obvious that he would encounter the man and woman on his daily stroll, and they would converse and commune with each other. Until it happened. The account gives us the impression that God was surprised that he did not find the first couple on his daily walk. "Where are you, Adam?" He asks. They are hiding in the bushes. They don't want God to know they have sinned.

This is the barrier between ourselves and God. It is not really that God sends us away. We hide from his presence. When the man and woman decided that they wanted to be in charge of their own lives, that set them in opposition to God. They ate the forbidden fruit, and they knew that they were other, other than God, apart from God. And then they feared him with an unrighteous fear. Their relationship with God was broken. Like children who have broken their mother's favorite vase they get out of the house as soon as they can. Oh, they might try to glue it together, but the best thing is to disappear. And they are under stress until they are found out. Mom knows they have done something, because they treat her as a stranger, afraid to confess, afraid to be discovered, afraid finally of her presence. And she can tell something wrong has happened.

Because they have committed the crime, they begin to mistrust their mother. They distance themselves from her. And so we do with God. Because we did not trust him to be God, we stop trusting him altogether and turn to fear. We engage in a self-induced exile from God. He is calling for us, but until we are ready to enter his presence and own up to our sin, we cannot come in from the cold.

PRAYER: Lord God, we know you are calling. You have gone to great lengths to bring us home to yourself. But we are afraid, and proud, and self-righteous. Help us to hear you when you call us, in your word, by your Spirit, in our hearts, in the events of life. Help us to come to you, to stop trying to hide. Amen.

February 20-Saturday

Exile From Each Other

READ: Genesis 2:19-25, 3:1-7

“They were both naked and unashamed”. No, this isn’t a premise for a racy movie. It shows us that the first couple were in such good sync, so tight in their relationship with each other that there was nothing to hide. They were comfortable in their own skin with each other. But when they ate the fruit, their eyes were opened. And the first thing that they knew from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was that they were alone. They looked at each other and found that this intimacy was gone. They saw each other as another and felt vulnerable. So they covered themselves.

Then they were found out. When God started asking questions they did what most children do when they are caught, deny, deflect or denounce another. And they were pointing fingers at each other, and at the serpent, and at God. “It’s this woman you gave me” Adam says to God. This sounds familiar to any parent. The Family Circus, a comic strip of yore, addressed this a lot. When something was broken in the house the parents would ask the kids who did it. And they would reply “Not Me”. Apparently this was an invisible gremlin, who was represented as transparent and had the legend “Not Me” across his front. He was the go-to object of blame for the children and took the job with glee.

As we go through the season of Lent, we can seek to undo the effects of this exile from our relationships. Pick up the phone, make a call. Guard your demeanor on Facebook and the internet. Do what you can to repair or restore relationships with those you love, but can’t imagine making peace with. They may be in the same boat. And be careful about pointing the finger. When you do, there are three fingers pointing back at you. Our worlds are small due to quarantine. Do what we can to make your world a little bigger.

PRAYER: Father, I am so alone. I miss people. Sometimes it’s because of the quarantine, other times because of a self-imposed wall I have placed between myself and others. Help me to break down those walls that I have built, so that when the quarantine is lifted, I may enter into a new wider world of whole relationships. Amen.

SONG: “Hello Again”

by Neil Diamond.

February 21 Sunday

## WORSHIP WITH OTHERS

February 22, Monday

Exile from Wisdom

READ: Psalm 14:1-3

I have worked in a few factories in my life. One of the big complaints from the grizzled veterans on the floor was that college-educated people had no common sense. I read that as meaning wisdom about the way to navigate through life and relationships. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge, a distinction that my co-workers understood and that I sometimes did not.

There are lots of kinds of wisdom. Some folks have street smarts, some folks know the easiest way to do something, others are really good at sensing the emotions of others. In Psalm 14, we read that the one without wisdom is the one who doubts that God is. That disbelief leads to wickedness and foolish behavior and ultimately ruin. To be exiled from God means to live in the fog of uncertainty and confusion. We don't know where to go or how to live a life of true joy. It's not that we don't have happy or peaceful moments. We cut ourselves off from the best joy and relationship we can have. We don't know where to find real life. So we wander in the shadows, searching for but never finding the truth.

To live in exile is hard. You have to think every step of the way. There is very little rest available because you can't take anything to granted. But those who know the Lord rest in the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we confess that our souls find no rest until they rest in you. Help us to live and walk in your wisdom. And help us to be wise, not foolish. Be the guiding light of our lives as we walk in your wisdom. Amen.

February 23, Tuesday.

Exile from Meaning

READ Ecclesiastes 1

The term vanities in this passage can better be thought of as vapor. Life is a vapor, an inconsequential, barely visible mist that hangs for a short while and then disappears. It is like the fog that rises out of the Mohawk river on fall mornings when the water is warmer than the air, and then quickly dissipates and is forgotten by the afternoon. That is what Solomon felt when he wrote this book. I think that this book was written toward the end of his life, when he had already succeeded in building his kingdom and erecting the monuments to himself. By this time, he had walked away from God, seduced by the luxury of living and his many foreign wives who drew his heart away from the one who had put him on the throne in the first place. In his self-imposed exile from God he found that life no longer had any purpose. There was no one else to serve but himself. There was nothing left to live for, nothing left to achieve. So he looked back and found it was all vanity, vapor, smoke.

The existentialists tell us that at this point people have a choice to make. Are they going to find meaning in their life, look for something to build around, or are they going to give up? Unfortunately, without God there is no ultimate, overarching meaning. Exile from God means there is no ultimate meaning in life, aside from get what you can while you can. If, like Solomon, you already have your heart's desire, what is left? Is there another road to travel down?

PRAYER: Father of us all, please help me draw close to you. Bring me out of exile, so that I may find that you are the source of all life, and that our meaning lies in and with you. Help me to know you and enjoy you forever. Amen.

## WEEK TWO

### The Deserted Land

February 24, Wednesday

READ: Lamentation 1:1-3  
COVID

The coming of

It was a grim late winter a year ago, wasn't it? We knew it was coming. We sent around half-hearted pictures on Facebook, presaging the Corona virus with images of men with beer cartons on their heads. But we knew it was coming. How long it would last and how bad it would be was a matter of conjecture, but we knew. And then it came. And the streets were deserted. People shut themselves up, alone with their thoughts. Suspicion and fear were the rule of the day. Was there any hope at all?

It was a time of stripping away. All the fluff, all the less than essential things, and some essentials, like toilet paper, were taken away. And we were left with what was important, food, shelter, and family. We learned how to stay together. We learned that we can think we have it all together, and with the flick of God's finger, it can all go away. And so while we were in our homes, our streets were deserted. Like Jerusalem after the Babylonian conquest, we were bereft of joy. In the silence, we were invited once more into the presence of God.

PRAYER: Oh God, we have not suffered like so many others. We have had a mere slice of devastation. We have lost loved ones, but not whole families. We have lost jobs, but not been enslaved. We have been bowed down, but not crushed. Help us to turn to you in this time of silence and separation. Help us to live in hope, so that when all is restored, we may gain a new appreciation of life in a wide open country. Amen.

February 25, Thursday

Silent Sanctuaries

READ Isaiah 1:10-14

When the churches were closed down there was a lot of angst. Why the churches and not the liquor stores? Just what was essential and what was not? The society as a whole had made the decision. Churches and other houses of worship were not essential. Lots of people thought that the virus was a convenient excuse to handicap the Lord's work. But what if the corona virus and the shutdown was God's work? What if God was using the occasion of the virus as a way to wake us up?

Our hearts rebel against such a notion. God would not intentionally hurt his people, would he? Ask Isaiah. He lived in a time when things weren't that great for Israel, but they weren't all bad. There was enough to go around, and a strong king, Hezekiah, had just ascended the throne. But God saw that the hearts of the people were not turned to him. They went to worship, they came and presented their sacrifices. But they weren't living in obedience to him in the rest of the week. Their love for God was forgotten when they left the temple. You could tell by the way they lived their lives. This made their formal worship into a travesty in the eyes of God. He wanted them to return to him. He wanted them to be good to their neighbors and upright in their actions. Then he would accept their worship. Is it possible that this is why he called for a pause to our worship? Do we need to get right with God, helping people, loving people, walking uprightly before him? It doesn't hurt for us to wonder.

PRAYER: Father, your ways are mysterious. Your thoughts are not like our thoughts. We see in part, you see the whole. Help us to walk in such a way that our actions are pleasing, and our worship is welcome. Amen.

February 26, Friday

A Divided People

Read I Kings 12:12-17

It is said that pressure does not build character, it reveals it. It also reveals fissures and fractures in seemingly united rocks and trees and other long lasting, hardy things. Step out on a frozen lake, hear the cracking and popping of the surface beneath you, and you will know what I mean.

In the time of COVID we saw that a lot of cracks and fissures that we didn't notice or thought were small were in fact large. The divisions in our country, and in our churches, became obvious. Like the Israelites, we were divided into camps. And perhaps we still are. Israel is an example of how a nation at the top of its game can chuck it all away as personal rivalries and bad decisions are amplified and then amplify the splits among people. So how do we put it back together? We center ourselves around God, serving God and living as he has taught us to. Lead with love for one another. Love that neighbor who was flying a banner that you believed was wrong. Listen, don't lecture. Be like Jesus, who does not hate, but loved the world enough to come and die for sinners like you and I.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, we have not loved as you showed us to. We have made enemies of folks who were our friends. We have let the pressure of the time split us. We have shown our worst side to others. Forgive us, we pray. Help us to stand with you when everyone is calling us to stand with them. Amen.

SONG "Love is the Answer" by England Dan and John Ford Coley.

February 27 Saturday

Fear

READ Genesis 12:10-20

Abraham prostituted his wife. That's the bald fact here. His wife Sarai was beautiful. She would attract the attention of powerful men. Abraham feared that they would kill him so they could take Sarai and present her to pharaoh. So to save himself he presented her as his sister not his wife, and she was taken into Pharaoh's house. That's what fear can do to you. It gets you to behave in a way you wouldn't ordinarily behave. It makes you weak. It makes you question motives. It makes you craven, snappish, and shifty. It turns out it also clouded Abraham's judgment. Pharaoh was not such a bad guy, given his position in the world. When he learned the truth, he returned Sarai to Abraham and made him rich besides.

COVID is not a person. It doesn't feel, or plot or plan. That might just make it scarier. And the fear makes it bigger in our minds. We need to be careful, we need to follow guidelines, and we need to stay safe. But we cannot allow it to change our natures. We still need to act as the people of God, not as those who jump at shadows or rise to every danger with a knife between our teeth. Instead, trust in God. Learn that his plans for you are good, no matter where they take you. Comfort the families of the afflicted. Help where you can while you stay safe.

PRAYER: Lord of all creation, help me to not fear. Help me to love instead. I confess that I have allowed my fear to get the best of me. This season of the world scares me, but you are still on your throne. Help me to trust you, and to love, for your perfect love casts out all fear. Amen.

February 28, Sunday

Worship with the brothers and sisters.

March 1, Monday

READ Jeremiah 23:16-22

Vain Hopes

During the pandemic we have heard many times that a miracle cure was right around the corner, or that the virus would burn itself out soon. We would be back at it by last summer, or this or that treatment would make it go away. We have prayed again and again that it would be taken away. We have heard of or known loved ones who were very sick and even died, and we mourn their trouble and their loss. There has been an increase of mental illness and people are having a hard time navigating the basics of life.

I am sure that God has heard our prayers. But the pandemic has not been lifted yet. Does God enjoy our pain or even inconvenience? Our faith, and the word of God, assure us that God does not willingly grieve the hearts of people. A God who would send his only begotten son to die for such as us would not allow the pandemic to continue out of spite or indifference. So where does that leave us? With the understanding that the allowance of the pandemic, with its varying degrees of suffering and inconvenience, has a role to play in God's purposes for this world. What those are we don't know. In Deuteronomy 29:29 we read "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..."(ESV). And so we are left to trust the goodness of God, and his providence, that God is working in the times of pandemic, and even through the pandemic. To him be the glory.

PRAYER: Our eternal and almighty God, you are good and loving. We trust that you do not willingly grieve the hearts of people. So give us patience in this time for the pandemic to run its course, and trust that you work all things together for good for those whom you love, who are called according to your purpose. Amen.

SONG "Blessed Be Your Name"

March 2, Tuesday

Separation

Read Jeremiah 29:1-9

My mother is in the nursing home down in Glenville. She is suffering from dementia. She does not easily recognize any of us. And still it hurts us to this day that we cannot go and visit her. And I reflect on all those who are in the homes, who are aware of the separation, and are lonely, bored and afraid. What is mercy in this case? How close to death does a resident have to be to receive the mercy of a visit from a family member? These are the type of questions that come up in times like these. And we find that there are very few cut and dried or good answers. Each agency involved in the care of the people has to make judgments and protocols, some of which are easy, and others are different. Would that a different, individual protocol could be established for each unique case. Our mother told us ages ago that we are not to keep her alive in a circumstance where there was no hope of recovery. She warned that she would haunt us if we did. So myself and my family are reasonably sure that in this case she would rather not be in the home, but at home with God. That being the case, we would like to go see her, whatever the prospective danger. But there are others in the home who are not in the same circumstance, and neither are their families. So we follow the procedure, and my mother, with a foot in the door of God's kingdom, lives in the foreign land of her nursing home, separated from us by her own condition as well as the circumstances we live in. And we look forward to the time when the separation will be over. And we pray to God for mercy in a time when there are no good, easy answers.

**PRAYER:** God of all mercy and comfort, we pray for those who are separated today, who are kept in a dry and weary land, far from those who love them. And be with those who take care of them, who risk their health and even their lives to take care of people who will not finally recover, no matter what their affliction. We pray that your Spirit will uphold them and bless them, and also we who pine and long for our loved ones. Amen.

## WEEK THREE

### Hope

March 3, Wednesday

Good times are coming

READ Jeremiah 29:10-14

It's interesting that for many the passage we read yesterday has often been used as a passage of comfort and promise. God knows the good he has planned for you. These words have given comfort and hope to many. But it is a word given to exiles, who are told to make their homes in exile. Don't expect to be released, most likely in your lifetime. Bloom where you are planted. Today's passage is better for hope and comfort. It is the promise, not that we will have a good life in the exile we are in, but rather that God will come and restore us to our homes. That is the promise he gives through Jeremiah. It is a message of hope for the future.

There will come a time when we are allowed back to the home of what we call "normal". And it won't take long for us to put this away in our minds. After all, it has been hard, but not dramatic, it has been painful, but not chaotic. Pain has many faces, not all of which are remembered forever. Otherwise, no family would have more than one child because of the pain of childbirth. So we will pass through this. We will tell stories, we will learn to do a better job of keeping safe, (After all, how many flu and cold epidemics have run through the country this year? Not many.) And when we do, may it be that we return to a better place than we were before, a place where we are cleaner, more thoughtful, and more careful with our thoughts and declarations. Let this be our hope.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, we trust your promise that this too shall pass. As you promised to take the exiles back to a better place than they were in previously, may we also not just return back where we came from, but to a better place, a better world, with more love, unity and care for one another. Amen.

March 4, Thursday

Hope in Trouble

READ II Corinthians 4:16-18

This passage is about trial and turmoil. In a way it is self-inflicted. Paul and his companions were afflicted because they were following Jesus in mission. So while they felt compelled by their Lord to obey his call to share the good news, it was still a choice. We who lived during the pandemic did not have this same choice. If we chose to not comply with safety measures we were admonished by our fellow citizens and subject to public prosecution. We had to think about whether we had a mask, or if we were in a safe event where people were all practicing social distance. And forget about hugs.

Balance that with what we are deprived of during the pandemic. They were in danger of bodily harm and death. We are in danger of personal inconvenience and, in certain cases which are not common, health risks. In our discomfort and inconvenience we may experience a small slice of the danger of Paul and his mission team.

So if we find it so hard, then how did they make it through? They had hope. Our hope is that the virus will soon be controlled and we can return to life as usual. Theirs is hope in the Lord, hope in eternal life. Perhaps as their danger was greater than our own, so their hope was in something stronger than ours. We hope in science and safety. They hoped in the Lord. And he can be our hope as well.

PRAYER: Dear Father, we live in a time of turmoil and trouble. There is so much division in our country. So much pain, suffering and uncertainty. We don't feel in control. Help us to trust that you are, and learn to rely on you. Amen.

March 5, Friday  
Hope

Hope and No

READ The Book of Jonah Chapter 1

Jonah has no hope. He hates the Ninevites. He wants them to be destroyed. But he also knows God. He knows God has a heart of love. So when he is told to go to Nineveh and warn them that their end was near, he ran off, in knowing disobedience to God. He knew that God wanted them to repent and live. And he could not accept a world where that happened. His hate would not allow it.

In contrast the sailors had hope. They first of all hoped that they could save Jonah from the fate that was ordained for him. They prayed to their gods (they did not know Jonah's God). They told him to pray to his God. But he would not. They rowed and rowed to get him to safety. They would not give up until he said that there was no hope, they must throw him in to the water. They believed that he was in the hands of his God. And so they threw him in. The result was instant. They were delivered from the storm and were safe on calm waters. But Jonah sunk down and down into the seas of despair.

When we give up hope, we too sink down into despair. When we do not love the ways of God, we rob ourselves of hope. When we choose disobedience over faith, believing we know better than God, we hope only in ourselves. Can you lift yourself out of the deep and roiling waters?

PRAYER: Dear Father, help us to trust you enough to believe that your plans are the best plans. Help us to embrace your path, trusting that it will lead us to you. Teach us to place our hope for the future in you. Amen

March 6, Saturday

We and Smelly Hope

READ Jonah 2

The movie that scared me most as a youngster was Pinocchio. I don't know if it was because of the giant whale that swallowed him, or the prospect of turning into a donkey that was worse, but it was one scary movie.

We often think that the whale in the story of Jonah was an agent of God's punishment of Jonah. Actually, it was his instrument of grace. No kidding. As awful as it may seem to be trapped in a large marine mammal for three days (and I'm sure the smell was terrible) it was better than drowning. And while he was in the belly of the well, that Jonah saw that God's grace was at work in his life. The poem he speaks tells us that. He finds that the love and grace of God are there for him, and he begins to hope. And with the hope that grows there also grows a resolution to obey God's original command. He would go to Nineveh, and leave the result up to God.

Hope is very important for obedience. The hope that when we do what God wants it will produce a result, that he will use our work for his kingdom helps motivate us. Psalm 90 ends with the prayer that God will establish the work of our hands, that is we hope that God will use what we do for his glory. If it makes no difference at all, if it is in vain, then we do not have hope and we do not act. Instead we sit like potatoes on our couches, and wait for the world to end, or the new season of TV, whatever comes first. Hope in God produces resolve and action.

PRAYER: Lord, we pray that you will indeed establish the work of our hands, and all our work in your name. Help us to live in obedience to your calling, in the sure hope in our Lord Jesus Christ that you call us to. Amen.

March 7, Sunday

Worship with the brothers and sisters.

March 8, Monday

Burlap Britches

READ Jonah 3

Nineveh was a bad town. Oh, sure it was well off. The loot of an empire was brought there. The schools were probably good. The arts were high-toned. But it was built on a history of sack and plunder. And the citizens were hard. Even the animals had a lot to repent of. You would think that they would tell Jonah to get lost, or short-sheet the bed in his motel room. But instead the words of Jonah hit them like an anvil in a Bugs Bunny cartoon. They were pole-axed by his simple warning, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed!”

Because of this, you would think that a rough town like that would decide that they had better have a party, because they didn’t want to go out while there was still booze laying around. That would have been a party of despair, not joy. You can imagine there would be a lot of brawling. Instead, their fear of impending doom resolved itself in hope. They got right with God. Even those animals wore the uniform of repentance, which was sackcloth and ashes. And Gd heard, and had mercy, and cancelled the plans for destruction.

How far is too far for us? Is there a sin that puts us beyond hope of God’s grace? Jesus mentions one, but it is the one that makes us unable to turn and repent. Don’t worry. If you are worried enough to want to repent, you aren’t committing it. You aren’t beyond the grace of God. If he can have mercy on a whole city like Nineveh, he’s got enough grace for you. So take heart and hope. You haven’t done anything that can keep God away forever. Turn around and return to him. He’s waiting.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, in your grace you died for me. You know my sin better than I do. And yet you gave yourself to save me from it. Help me never to lose hope that your forgiveness is stronger than all my sin. Amen.

March 9, Tuesday

Hope As A Chance

READ Jonah 4

Do you think that everyone should get his just deserts? I know the feeling. I have ratted on my sisters and brothers from time to time. I too have wanted justice to be done, just not on me. It's tempting to think that if we can point out the flaws and errors of others enough, that no one will notice our own. What's worse is when we think that we really have kept a clean slate, that we are flawless all on our own.

That's where Jonah is here. He thought that because he was obedient to God, and finally went to Nineveh with the word, God would back him up and destroy the town. No dice. And Jonah remembered why he took off in the first place. He knew that God's heart was inclined toward forgiveness. He had forgiven Jonah, after all. But there was still the problem of the hate that Jonah had toward Nineveh. Not really hard to understand. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and Assyria was putting the squeeze on Israel, real hard. They had ground a lot of nations under their heels, and Israel was next on the list. So how can God have grace on Nineveh?

God explains it with the use of the shade plant. The moral is that God had grace on Jonah. Why can't he have mercy on Nineveh? There are so many of them, and they are so blind. God is going to act in hope. Hope that Nineveh would turn, which happened, and hope that they would stay turned, which did not, apparently. You don't see Nineveh around today, do you? But it was worth a shot. That's what hope gets us to do, sometimes. At the very least, we give it a shot, because we hope that change can come, even in our own lives.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, help us to give grace, love, and mercy a shot. Even toward ourselves. Help us to forgive those who have hurt us, and forgive ourselves, in the hope that in forgiveness we can all find eternal life. Amen.

**SPECIAL TREAT** Beg, borrow, or steal a copy of "Jonah" the Veggie Tales movie. You will be singing "The Pirates that Don't Do Anything" for weeks.

