Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, amen.

The message and common theme in all our texts today is ‘to turn’. Like last week, there is much more to the story of Jonah and Nineveh than just the text. Furthermore, when placed into context of Israel’s history, the message becomes a clear warning of God’s righteousness. To begin with, who is Jonah? Jonah is a prophet to the Northern Kingdom approximately 750 BC. As some will say, timing is everything, but so is location (just ask a realtor: location, location, location.). The time and location of Johan and his visit to Nineveh is no coincidence.

Nineveh would be located in modern day Iraq and approximately 750 miles from Jerusalem; this is not a days-walk, but rather a journey that God is telling Jonah to take. However, Jonah does not want to serve God when he is called, and decides to sail away to Tarshish. And he does sail away, right into a major storm! The others on the boat are praying to their gods for protection from the storm and they advise Jonah to do the same. However, when Jonah tells them he is running away from his God, they throw him overboard and the seas immediately calm down. When this happens, the people on the boat come to know Jonah’s God and offer their sacrifices and vows.

We know the story and now Jonah, a prophet to Israel is leaving his jurisdiction and heading towards unknown territory to give the people (leaders and citizens) a 40-day warning of their destruction. More about Nineveh; it is one of the largest (if not the largest, depending upon your source) in the world at the time. Think about this, a city does not reach this size overnight and must have the means to support its size. Nineveh is established and growing, and Jonah enters the city to declare to them in 40 days, the city will be destroyed. Well, the king of Nineveh takes Jonah seriously and makes a proclamation that no person or animal shall eat or drink anything. Additionally, all will wear sackcloth and shall cry out to God; and all shall turn from their evil ways.

We know the end of this story, but do we know the end of *the* story? Nineveh is spared for now and in approximately 140 years later (in 612 BC), Nineveh was destroyed in a war; it will never recover or come back into existence. Is there a point here? We have to accept that if the story of God’s prophet Jonah was recorded and canonized, then the story of Jonah does not end with the 4th Chapter. The story of Jonah and Nineveh must return to the people of Israel as a warning of what will happen to them if they do not change their ways and turn back to the Lord God!

After hearing the story of God’s grace and mercy to Nineveh, Israel does not turn and loses their homeland; they lose everything and become exiled under the Babylonians. Three generations pass between Jonah and the exile, which is plenty of time for the story to be told and the Word of God to be recorded. But while Nineveh may have been destroyed, God will preserve a remnant of Israel who will eventually return to Jerusalem and encounter the Messiah.

Our Epistle reading ends with the words, “for this world is passing away.” For Nineveh, this has come to pass. For us, the world around us continues to pass away with each day whether we see it or not. Consider the things that were of great value for you earlier in life; or places and things where you invested your time. Do you still have them? Or, have they too passed away. The heart of the Epistle reading is to embrace now, the Kingdom of Heaven and turn from the influences of this world that take your time away from God.

There are many things to consider regarding God’s message to us through Nineveh today; and it will continue to turn our focus upon a holy relationship with Him through or Lord Jesus Christ. God tells us through His Word that He is jealous and wants to be first in our life. He does not want the time we have left over at the end of the day or week; He wants to be included in all we do and all we endure. He wants us to apply the example of the calling of His twelve disciples and calls us to respond in a way where He can teach and lead us in His ways to the glory of God. It is simple, true, and clear.

We must live in a world, that is passing away with each day; however, we have what the world can never offer. We have our Lord Jesus Christ to trust, rely, and depend upon; we have something that will never pass away. My friends, it is our place to share all we have come to know and experience with future generation for their sake, for their strength, and for their peace! Last week Eli was held accountable for failing to discipline his sons who blasphemed God and the Holy Spirit; and the sons passed away quickly. The great city of Nineveh was spared when then turned to God and changed their evil ways, but we have no records to show if they remained faithful to God or if they returned to their previous ways. All we know is that Nineveh does not exist today; they too have indeed passed away.

On some Sundays, we open with the Gospel, but today we close with the Gospel to summarize the message of turning. “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” When you hear these words, do you also hear the click/snap that reminds us that if God said it, then the Holy Spirit is already fulfilling those words? The Words of our Lord are not a suggestion or recommendation; they are the will of God being made known to us; they are a declaration.

Of our own motivations, we are not going to do something that requires us to deviate from the courses of worldly life. It takes a miracle for us to turn to God; it takes an Epiphany; and in some cases, it will take a storm! Regardless of our response time, God will be made known in our life and we will believe in the Good News. When Jesus calls His disciples and says ”Follow me” (snap/click), it is the Holy Spirit that acts to fulfill those words. None of the disciples say no. Even Jonah, who resists, responds to the Word of God. Sure, he kicks, scratches, and yells right to the end of the narrative, but the Word of God will never be disregarded. Never.

We are the same people today as we read about in Holy Scripture. Sure, we too hear God’s call to service, and we might resist to what we hear. Eventually we respond and serve as we are called. We simply cannot ignore what God is calling us to do, but we can kick and scream along the way and fuss about how unfair it is that ***we*** have to do something that we do not see others doing. But as my very dear Jewish friend Harry would offer as reassurance; it is a blessing in simply knowing that God has called us. And if He called us, He will also remain with us during our service to Him; we have His Word and promise on this!

When/if you ever begin to feel burdened by service, ask for the strength to turn your focus on His will, His ways, and His relationship. Turn; because the world that is trying to bring us down is passing away with each day of our life. Turn, and the faithful grace of God will always provide you with: the peace that passes all understanding to keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, now and forever. Amen!