Where do we go from here? That’s something that I have been thinking and praying about for weeks. I don’t have a clear cut answer for me or for you but know that God is at work in our lives. As I went through scripture for worship I was struck by stories of storms, in Genesis with Noah, Exodus with Moses, Job, Jonah, Isaiah, storms in the Psalms, Sea of Galilee and even Paul in the book of Acts. Some of these were physical and some were metaphorical but we have encountered the chaos that storms bring. Where is God in the midst of the storm? For the next 4 weeks, we will look at God in the storm we create, God in the storms around us, God using storms to change our plans and finally God in the storms that propel us out.

How many of us know the story of Jonah beyond our children’s Sunday school experience? I can say that in more than a decade of preaching, I have never preached on Jonah. The most I’ve done was a preschool chapel time with Jonah and the big fish. As I hit the books, I was struck that the storm that Jonah faced is one entirely of his own making. God sent Jonah to Nineveh. Jonah was not having it. In truth Jonah was so stubborn that he went the opposite direction of Nineveh to Tarshish. Now, I am sure none of us here are stubborn. I know I’m not, I’m strong willed, an important character trait. Stubborn on the other hand is not good, right it leads to obstinance and not obedience. And yet, it was Jonah’s disobedience that lead others to faith in God.

If we knew Hebrew, we would know from the very first verse that the author was not celebrating Jonah’s actions. In fact, he is identified in 1:1 as “son of Amittai,” a name derived from the Hebrew root that means “to be faithful.” But, of course, Jonah proves to be anything but a “son of faithfulness.” Jonah ignored and ran in the opposite direction of where God sent him to help the people who were wicked. We do not even have to imagine what a hard task it would be to preach the way of God to people who were more interested in their own way than God’s. We live in a time where we have a strong likeness to the stiff neck and hard-hearted people who Moses lead in the wilderness. And even the Jonah was not interested or willing to preach the word of God, he delivered a ship full of believers when the storm came.

Jonah’s running away from Nineveh lead a ship full of men to become believers in the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land as recorded in verse 9. In verse 16 the men, after the sea calms, feared the Lord even more, they offered a sacrifice to God and made vows. This is an extraordinary story of conversion, on par with the conversion that happens on the day of Pentecost. This is important because it was not the faithfulness of Jonah that converted them. In fact, it was the disobedience of Jonah that created the storm that found this ship in danger and lead to faithful acts from people who did not know God.

Jonah literally finds himself in a storm that he brought on himself. It was the storm that lead others to believe in God and brings about a change in Jonah’s heart and mind. And yet even though he caused it God was there to save them all. What does this say about God? That God is greater than we can ever hope to be. He didn’t say I told you so, providing calm to the storm that was raging for those who were still on the ship. God didn’t stop there but provided safe place for Jonah. Now, I’m not sure that I would enjoy being in the belly of a really big fish but it beats floating in the sea. Too often we think of the Old Testament as hard, eye for an eye. And yet, when we read through Genesis last summer and now Jonah we see that God continually tries to save the people of God.

In the belly of the fish Jonah has a change of heart. He sings of God’s praises. Now lest we think Jonah has completely reformed, we could read chapters 3 & 4 to learn that any changes in Jonah’s heart is short-lived. And yet

May we practice living in peace. May we practice living forgiveness so that others may see the mystery of God and peace that is offered when in relationship with the one who made each of us. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.