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AMBS window

Accompanied by Jonah

Allan Rudy-Froese, Ph.D. candidate, Assistant Professor of Christian Proclamation

Jonah has stuck with me since childhood. Like most kids staring at the standard Jonah picture book, I was curious—and more than just a little afraid—about the prospect of being eaten by a whale and sitting for three slimy, stinky, yet prayerful days leaning on a gigantic spleen.

Jonah stayed with me as a teenager but I was less enthralled by the contours of the whale's inner workings and more bent on argument. Really? Can a guy stay in the belly of the whale for three days? If this story is not "true," then which other stories in the Bible also are fanciful tales? Some years later, as a lonely young adult away from all that was familiar, I found myself speaking to God with Jonah's prayer. I too was falling—going down down down—and Jonah had just the right words for my prayer.

Jonah accompanied me to college, seminary and graduate school. I discovered in the academy that Jonah's story has captivated and delighted Jews, Christians and Muslims

for millennia. It was not only the theologians, historians and scholars of sacred texts who were interested; spinners of stories have found this short book inspiring: Jonah bargaining on the deck of a doomed ship, praying in belly of the whale, preaching in Nineveh and arguing with God begs to be imagined anew in every place and time.

Jonah, as scholar Yvonne Sherwood states, has had an amazing "after life." There are myriads of allusions to Jonah in western literature, visual art, music and more recently in film. It is hard to resist a story which has a fast-moving plot, a motley cast of characters, a guy who gets swallowed by a whale and lives, and a God who continues to pursue an unpredictable prophet.

Jonah continues to accompany me when I serve as resource person for church retreats, work with ministers and students, and sometimes when I preach. Reading Jonah out loud, acting out scenes from the story and

mining the historical occasion of Jonah is not only entertaining but carries us to lively discussions and a deeper understanding of faith. There is so much here: human frailty, prayer, confession, repentance, jealousy and disgust toward the "other." In Jonah we get to sort out the similarities and differences between story, parable, poetry, prophesy, comedy and tragedy. Last but not least we see and experience God's amazing and disorienting grace.

Jonah the prophet can be faulted on many fronts, but he did get something right. It is just a little line said at the bottom of the sea in the belly of the whale, but it still needs to be proclaimed: "Salvation belongs to God." ●

Photo: Lydia Nofziger, new student from Archbold, Ohio, and Allan Rudy-Froese confer about fall classes. To learn more about Allan, visit www.ambs.edu/about/faculty/Rudy-Froese-Allan

Challenges for us in the book of Jonah

Safwat Marzouk, Ph.D. candidate, Assistant Professor of Old Testament



The book of Jonah engages God's relationship with non-Israelites in a unique way when compared with other books of the Old Testament. The non-Israelites who are usually represented as Israel's enemy, oppressors, subject to divine judgment, or are portrayed as a tool used by God to punish Israel, are now the subject of divine mercy and compassion. God sends the prophet Jonah to Nineveh initially to proclaim to the Ninevites the pending divine judgment as a just response to their wickedness.

For an unstated reason the prophet decides not to go to Nineveh; instead he goes the opposite direction, to Tarshish. While some think that Jonah did not want to go because he is nationalistic, others think that Jonah was concerned about his prophetic ministry: God sends him to proclaim a message of judgment, then God relents, and Jonah would appear to be

a false prophet whose prophetic words of judgment did not come to pass.

The prophet's flight to Tarshish brings danger and transformation to the sailors who were facing the threat of death as God stirred the wind of the sea because Jonah was on the boat. Unlike Jonah who was seeking to flee from the presence of the LORD (1:3), the sailors acknowledge the presence of the LORD in the midst of the sea; they feared the LORD, prayed and offered sacrifices (1:10, 14, 16). Despite the danger of drowning and sinking, these non-Israelites initially worked very hard to avoid throwing Jonah in the midst of the sea. They were concerned for the well-being of the source of their troubles.

When Jonah finally made it to Nineveh, he cried out: "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overturned!" (3:4) The prophet's message is very succinct and obscure.

The Hebrew word translated "overthrown" could denote a positive meaning—"overturned"—or a negative one—"destroyed." The meaning of the message does not just lie in the sender and the words, but also in how the audience responds to it.

The people of Nineveh believed in God; these outsiders determined the meaning of the message by their repentance. The Ninevite king preached a longer message of repentance than the one proclaimed by Jonah! The king is hoping that "God may relent and change his mind."

The Ninevites changed, and now it was God's turn to change. The reader is soon informed that God "changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it." (3:10) The compassionate and merciful character of God that is usually preached to the Israelites (Joel 2:13-14) is now experienced by the Ninevites (Jonah 4:1-2).

The sailors' acknowledgment of the presence of God in the midst of the sea and God's compassionate and merciful response to the repentance of the Ninevites challenge us as readers of the Old Testament, who always deem the non-Israelites as outside the circle of the divine mercy and compassion. ●

Photo: Safwat Marzouk teaches a course on Exodus this fall. To learn more about Safwat, visit www.ams.edu/about/faculty/marzouk-safwat

alumni news

Willard Swartley (Bachelor of Divinity 1962, faculty 1978–2004, professor emeritus) is a contributor to *Preaching God's Transforming Justice: A Lectionary Commentary, Year B, Featuring 22 New Holy Days for Justice*, published by Westminster John Knox Press. This work is the first to help preachers focus on implications for social justice in every biblical reading in the Revised Common Lectionary. Twenty-two Holy Days for Justice are introduced, enlarging the church's awareness of God's call for justice.

Ordinations

Jennifer Eriksen Morales (Master of Divinity 2007), May 15, for work as conference LEADership Minister with Franconia Mennonite Conference.

Heidi Siemens-Rhodes (Master of Divinity 2005) May 29, Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen.

Christina Litwiller (Master of Divinity 2009) June 26, Salina (Kan.) Mennonite Church.

Paula Killough (Master of Divinity 2008) June 5, Prairie Street Mennonite Church, Elkhart, for work with Mennonite Mission Network

Adam Tice (Master of Arts in Christian Formation 2007) June 12, Hyattsville (Md.) Mennonite Church.

Renee Kanagy (Master of Divinity, 2008), Sept. 25, New Creation Fellowship, Newton, Kan. ●

Immersed in Scripture

In addition to the curriculum for masters programs, AMBS offers this wide variety of biblical teaching and resources.

Institute of Mennonite Studies

www.ambs.edu/programs-institutes/ims/new-releases

Youth Ministry at a Crossroads: Tending to the Faith Formation of Mennonite Youth

Andy Brubacher Kaethler and Bob Yoder, editors; copublished with Herald Press, 2011

“When young people realize that in holding the Bible ... they are holding a treasure that has been preserved for them across time, and when they realize that this treasure is ... understandable and authoritative, they will be on their way to a lasting faith.”
— Preston Frederic Bush

Forming Christian Habits in Post-Christendom: The Legacy of Alan and Eleanor Kreider

James R. Krabill and Stuart Murray, editors; copublished with Herald Press, 2011

“We need scripture to enlarge our imagination and to expand our faith, as time and time again we get to exclaim—See! See what happened here and what God has done! Scripture gives us permission to dream daringly about a new heaven and a new earth.”
— Sian Murray Williams

Take our moments and our days: An Anabaptist prayer book

Vol. 1, Ordinary time; Vol. 2, Advent through Pentecost

Daily services are filled with “scripture-saturated prayer.”
www.ambs.edu/prayerbook

Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology Volume 11 Number 2: Teaching the Bible in the congregation; copublished with Canadian Mennonite University

Mary Schertz, editor of this issue, notes she is “on a journey to discover ways we can together read the Bible as if our lives depended on it.”
www.mennovision.org/Volume11-2.htm

Church Leadership Center

Pastors Week, January 23–26, 2012

Understanding Revelation for Today

Presenter: Loren L. Johns with a session by Nelson Kraybill

Pastors Week will look at how the mysterious message of Revelation can shape our preaching, teaching and daily life nearly two millennia later.
www.ambs.edu/pastorsweek

Leading God’s People

Curriculum for Pastoral Studies Distance Education and the Journey program

Unit 2, The Biblical Story, offers a Bible survey, with the goal of helping students describe the thread of biblical history (“salvation history”) and major themes and trajectories of the Bible.
www.ambs.edu/programs-institutes/clc/leading-gods-people

Online course—Spring 2012

Biblical Foundations of Peace and Justice

Taught by Mary H. Schertz, Ph.D., Professor of New Testament (3 credit hours)
Register by Jan. 3 to receive a discount

The Bible bears witness to the Holy Warrior God and the prophet who

decries peace without justice, the Jesus who came not to bring peace but a sword, as well as the Jesus who weeps over Jerusalem. This class examines biblical passages for reflecting on peace and justice praxis today.

www.ambs.edu/academics/courses/spring

Mennonite Cooperative Bookstore

The bookstore at AMBS has Bibles, Bible study aids and commentaries within its inventory of 3,000 titles.

www.ambs.edu/bookstore

AMBS Library

The Studer Bible Collection, gathered by Gerald Studer, is featured in the AMBS Library. It includes Bibles in many languages, translations and versions.

www.ambs.edu/library



The seminary community recently celebrated the release of *Youth Ministry at a Crossroads* with editors Bob Yoder and Andy Brubacher Kaethler.



Your gifts at work

“**Journey: A Conference-based Leadership Development Program** is meeting an important need among bi-vocational ministers,” Jewel Gingerich Longenecker, associate dean for leadership education, said. “Most people in the program combine jobs and ministry assignments. We repeatedly hear that Journey is helping to form and deepen Anabaptist identity among these people who have been called into leadership by their congregations”

The program currently involves 16 mentees and 11 mentors, including Janice Wagner from Engadine, Mich. (left). Ten mentees came to the Mennonite church as adults, so their experiences in Journey are orienting them to the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith and to their calling in ministry.

Journey is coordinated by the AMBS Church Leadership Center and is cosponsored with Central District and Indiana-Michigan Conferences. ●

The purpose of *AMBS Window* is to invite readers to call people to leadership ministries, and to provide ways for readers to become involved with AMBS through financial support, prayer support and student recruiting.

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See the AMBS photo gallery to watch progress on the renovation of our Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount.

Subscribe to the AMBS calendar
www.amsb.edu/calendars/events



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President's Window

Sara Wenger Shenk, President

I grew up with two storyteller parents—who regaled us with tales about when “I was a little boy” or when “I was a little girl.” They also told lots of Bible stories about people who in puzzling ways heard God’s call and dared to take risks.

My parents liberally used biblical wisdom to spice their parental advice. They rejoiced when a “contemporary” version of the Bible came out and bought us each our own copy. When dull Bible teachers or boring preachers didn’t do the magnificent Scriptures justice, they fiercely advocated for better-educated preachers and teachers.

Now, as a seminary president, I look back on that early formation in my family with profound gratitude. I heard the music and poetry of the biblical narratives through my parent’s dramatic storytelling. I heard the mystery of the Word of God in their respectful reverence—thankfully echoed by many other fine teachers and preachers over the years.

I’ve also heard, however, biblical stories manipulated into mind-numbing caricatures and flattened into bland uniformity. I’ve observed how

code words are used to flush out folks not clear enough about the authority of the Bible. I’ve listened as biblical poetry is reduced to stick-figure literalisms and its mystery to abstract propositions.

In some circles, it seems that the Bible is meant to function like a well-engineered machine, and our job is to keep tinkering until its perfect harmonization convinces people that it truly is the Word of God. Instead, the

Bible confounds us with its complexity, conflicting perspectives and diversity of voices, cultures and visions. One pastor told me recently, quoting one congregant while saying he speaks for others as well: “I have real trouble with this Bible!”

For all kinds of reasons, many of us have “trouble” with the Bible. I am immensely pleased that at AMBS, we don’t just have “Biblical” in our name. We have excellent Bible faculty who know how to face the “trouble” head-on. Not only do they love to teach the Bible, but they are also wise guides into its multi-splendored beauty and its astonishing ability to reveal God to us. ●



panorama

2012 Lectureships

Peace and Justice Guest: Carolyn Holderread Heggen, Feb. 28–March 2. Her visit will include a daylong workshop on Feb. 29, “Healing the spiritual sounds of war.”
www.amsb.edu/workshops

Theological Lectureship: Marlene Kropf and Daniel Schipani, March 27–29. Focus on spiritual formation, particularly among groups with diversity in culture and race.

Chapel renovation continues

The Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount will now include a larger foyer with an elevator and main floor restrooms. The existing space will have greater energy efficiency. See the changes as they unfold in the gallery at www.facebook.com/followAMBS

Spring online courses

Register by Jan. 3 to receive a discount on the following online classes:

- **Turnaround Strategies for Churches**, taught by Gerald Shenk

- **Biblical Foundations of Peace and Justice**, taught by Mary H. Schertz

Webinars bring resources to you

- **Re-forming Anabaptism**, Nov. 1, with Joanna Shenk
- **Lent Planning**, Feb. 2, with Marlene Kropf and Rosanna McFadden
- **What’s Mennonite about the missional church?** March 8, with Lois Barrett
- **Doing theology as thriving rural communities**, March 21, with David Boshart ●