

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalms 51:11



In today's passage from the Book of Jonah, Jonah proclaims to the inhabitants of Nineveh that God will destroy them. Shockingly, the king and inhabitants of the city listen and change their ways. This is not how things normally go. In most books of the Bible, we hear prophets proclaim God's message to hardened hearts. And yet, because Nineveh repented and changed its ways, God "changed his mind" (Jonah 3:10). God does not destroy the city, and everyone is left happy.

Well, almost everyone.

The one unhappy soul is Jonah himself. After all, God's merciful act has left Jonah hanging out there looking like a fool. God received

what God desired, and the city of Nineveh was saved, but Jonah's credibility and ego are sorely bruised.

Part of the reason why I love the book of Jonah, and this story in particular, is because it became part of a later tradition that reflected how following God will sometimes end up making you look like a fool. This resulted in a Christian Holy Fool tradition that drank deeply from the Book of Jonah, a spiritual path in which imitating Christ meant becoming a fool to respectable society, albeit a kind of holy fool ultimately grounded in God's love.

Today's readings

Psalms 51:11–18 | Jonah 3:1–10 | Luke 11:29–32

Let's be honest: choosing to follow Christ can occasionally feel like a strange and surprising choice. If it sometimes feels like foolishness, how can this be a way of identifying more deeply with figures like Jonah and Christ, whose journeys with God led them to the margins?