What's Your Vine? Oct. 29, 2011
Cornerstone Global Missions Emphasis 2011 Final Sunday

Good morning everyone. In your worship folder, you'll find an insert entitled Cornerstone's Global Missions Ministry. Please take that out for a second if you would. This pamphlet, which I introduced in last week's service, contains information about the biblically-rooted principles that have begun to drive Cornerstone's Global Missions Ministry, and will do so well into the future.

My original intention for this 20-minute missions talk I'm about to share was to highlight and unpack a couple of the Global Missions Core Values that are in this pamphlet. But this past Friday, I sensed that God was re-directing me as to the focus of this talk. I asked you to pull out this pamphlet in order to bring it to your attention, and encourage you to read it over *later*. When you do, I think you'll be quite encouraged at the direction Cornerstone's Global Missions Ministry is taking, and the way it continues to mature. At this time, however, I will ask you to put those pamphlets down, because it's time for me to share with you the new direction that I believe that Lord has laid on my heart for this Global Missions devotional.

Please turn with me in your Bible to the Old Testament book of **Jonah**. We'll be reading from **chapter 4, verses 5-11.** If you're using one of the blue Cornerstone Bibles, you'll find this reading on page 655. It'll be on the screen as well. Please follow along as I read:

> 5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city.
> There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to
> see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the LORD God
> provided a leafy plant[a] and made it grow up over Jonah to
> give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was
> very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God
> provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it
> withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east
> wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew
> faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to
> die than to live."
>
> 9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about
> the plant?"
>
> "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."
>
> 10 But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this
> plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up
> overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern
> for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a
> hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their
> right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

In this passage, Jonah gets angry... angry enough to die, even... over a vine. Have you ever found yourself getting upset over something that in hindsight seemed... quite silly? Like the travelling salesman who one rainy night got a flat tire while driving along a lonely country road. To his dismay, he didn't have a tire wrench in his car. Seeing a nearby farmhouse, he set out on foot. Surely the farmer would have a tire wrench he could borrow. "But would the farmer even come to the door at this time of night?" the salesman wondered. "And if he did, he'd probably be all aggravated. He'd say something like, 'What's the big idea getting me out of bed in the middle of the night?'" The thought of the farmer's unhelpfulness made the salesman angry. "Why, that farmer is a selfish old clod to refuse to help me." Finally, he made it to the front porch of the farm house. Frustrated and drenched, he banged on the door. A voice called out from a window overhead: "Who's there?" "You know good and well who it is," yelled the salesman, his face red with anger. "It's me! And you can keep your stupid tire wrench! I wouldn't borrow it if it were the last one in the country!" Then he tromped back through the wet night to his incapacitated car, empty handed.

Sometimes the things we get upset about, or preoccupied with, are just plain silly, aren't they? When this happens, our perspective on reality get skewed, and our hearts and attitudes toward others become distorted.

God sent a worm to destroy a vine that was providing shade for Jonah. American colonist Patrick Henry said, “Give me liberty or give me death!” Jonah said, “Give me my vine, or give me death!” God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?” Jonah replied, “Darn straight it is!” He felt so very justified in his reaction.

You see, God had asked Jonah—who was an Israelite prophet— to go to the Assyrian city of Nineveh to preach. To Jonah and many of his fellow Israelites, the people of Nineveh were contemptible, godless foreigners with a reputation for cruelty and ruthlessness. Initially, Jonah refused to go to Nineveh, but with God’s persuasion and some help from a really big fish, as you may recall, he ending up preaching there after all. And guess what? The people of Nineveh responded to Jonah’s preaching and turned to God! This... made Jonah mad. In fact, chapter 4 starts out by saying that Jonah was “greatly displeased and became angry” about how the people of Nineveh were turning to God. “I knew you’d go and get all compassionate on those people, Lord,” Jonah thought. “Have you forgotten they’re our enemies?”

Jonah was just not a happy camper.... until he went and sat down in a little shelter east of the city. From this vantage point, he would be able to see what happened to Nineveh. Perhaps God would realize his mistake and bring down judgment on the city after all—maybe a little fire and brimstone action. Suddenly, this lovely green vine grows up and weaves its way through the slats of Jonah’s shelter. Its shade offers welcome relief from the intense heat of the arid landscape. Now, Jonah had a nice cool, comfortable spot where he could relax and hopefully watch Nineveh burn. In verse 6, the text actually says that Jonah was very happy about the plant. Ah, maybe life wasn’t so bad after all...

But then God sent the worm to chew up and wither Jonah’s vine, and then came a scorching east wind. The sun blazed down on the prophet. This made Jonah hopping mad. So mad he wanted to die. Over a dead plant. Sounds silly, right?

And it is. Jonah’s silliness—his warped sense of priorities and perspective- is the very point of the passage. Because Jonah had more concern for a plant than he had for an entire foreign city of full of people who did not know God. “You have been concerned about this plant,” God told him in verse 11, “though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

God’s heart beats for people who are far away from him. And God’s heart beats for the poor, the suffering, the downtrodden, the oppressed. God calls his people to participate, to get involved, in his mission to redeem and restore this fallen world. We are called to:

- Declare his glory among the nations, his wonders among all peoples (Psalm 96:3).
- ... to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and break every yoke ... to share [our] food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when [we] see the naked to clothe them... (Isaiah 58:6-7).
- Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... (Matthew 28:19).

Yes, God’s heart beats for the nations. But our hearts are often out of touch with God’s heart, aren’t they? On this Global Missions Sunday, we would do well to ask if we are not sometimes like Jonah. Like Jonah, we, as followers of Jesus, are called to participate in God’s mission to redeem and restore this fallen world. And like Jonah, our attitudes and actions often betray the fact that when it comes right down to it, we, in a manner of speaking, care more for plants than for people. When God calls us to our Ninevehs, we often run in the opposite direction, like Jonah did. Like Jonah, we are often more concerned about our comfort and convenience, about our personal biases and selfish agendas, than we are about rolling up our sleeves and opening up our wallets and giving up some of our vacation time to help those in need.

So this morning, the question I want you to consider is: WHAT'S YOUR VINE? What biases, what judgmental attitudes, what fears, what feelings, what trivialities, what preoccupations are you more concerned about that you are God's call to actively participate in his mission to redeem and restore the world? I ask again: WHAT'S YOUR VINE?

Specifically, because this is a Global Missions service, what vines are drawing your attention away from what might well be God's call for you to get personally and sacrificially involved in Global Missions?

- Maybe getting more deeply involved in Global Missions challenges the boundaries of your comfort zone. Like Jonah, maybe it's all too easy for you to sit in the cool shade of your convenient surroundings than to venture out into the hot sun and obey God.
- Or maybe you've been on a short-term mission before, and your attitude is, "Been there, done that." Is your vine novelty, perhaps? I've heard a number of perspectives on why people don't return to the short-term mission field after their first time or two. Some are perfectly legitimate. But I think some boil down to being preoccupied with vines of one kind or another. It's not for me to determine who has a vine issue and who doesn't. But will you be courageous enough to ask God what your vine might be, and honest enough to take ownership of his answer, and faithful enough to take obedient action from there, as the Lord leads you?

A bit later in the service, you'll have a chance to fill out the Global Missions Commitment form for 2012. To help begin preparing our hearts for that, I'd like to give you a quiet moment now to listen to what the Lord may be whispering to your spirit. WHAT'S MY VINE, LORD? That's the question that you can take to the Lord now, attentive to what he brings to mind, in these next few moments of silence...