



United Church of God *an International Association*

Roy Holladay
Chairman

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Interim President

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Dear Fellow Brethren,

Preparations for the annual General Conference of Elders this weekend are peaking, and we're all excited to see our ministers and their wives begin to gather here for three important days. As we prepare for this series of meetings and the upcoming year in the work of the Church, I'd like to invite you to consider a few things.

A video segment that I've recorded twice now is called "About our Father's Business," a reference to Christ's statement who, even as a 12-year-old, appeared in the Jerusalem Temple and displayed knowledge and wisdom well beyond His years. Now, I'd like to ask you, how are we in the United Church of God being about our Father's business?

Did you know that there are presently more than 16 million people in the United States and around the globe who keep the seventh day Sabbath? Did you know that these people consider themselves Christian and keep the Sabbath as they understand how Jesus and the apostles kept the Sabbath? The vast number of these Sabbath keepers don't observe the Holy Days because they don't understand the significance of them. They don't have the precious understanding of God's plan of salvation that we are blessed to have. They come close to a more complete knowledge of the truth in many instances, but then they fall short. God has not yet opened their eyes.

Considering all of that, here's an important point. Many of these Sabbath-keepers know much about us and the entire Church of God movement. What do you think they see? Do they see God's spirit in action in a highly inviting way? As a result of seeing that way in action, are they drawn to consider a deeper understanding of God's word and truth?

As we approach the weekly Sabbath and, in a few weeks the Day of Pentecost, I'd like to offer some thoughts from perhaps an unusual source.

When Jesus was asked for a confirming sign of who He was and what He was doing, He replied in a highly remarkable way: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." We read that in Matthew chapter 12, verse 39, and we in the Church of God are well familiar with how Jesus said that He would be in the grave for three full days and three full nights, just as "Jonah was in three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish" (verse 40).

We usually read this around the Passover time, so why am I bringing this up here?

The book of Jonah is very short compared to other books of the Bible. It is also one of the most controversial. Many scholars dismiss it as allegorical or metaphorical. Many don't believe any of it happened.

Given that scholarly view, did Christ say something like "based on the children's fairy tale about Jonah, I will be in the grave just as Jonah imagined he was in the legendary fish"?

No brethren, of course He did not.

What he *did* do was to completely validate the book of Jonah and its content. He confirmed that it all happened.

So here's my point today and my question to you. What *did* happen in the book of Jonah and how might that be relevant for us today in the United Church of God? It's a much bigger lesson than one about a fish.

As I mentioned, it's a short book. You can quickly read it in one setting. But here's its main theme, which our soon coming King and Elder Brother completely validated.

The book is about a message that God directly gave to one of His servants and how that servant tried to dodge his responsibility for delivering it. God didn't destroy him for not following what God said to do, but God did go to great lengths to get Jonah's attention. Jonah was to deliver a message of warning to the city of Nineveh, which the Bible calls "an exceedingly great city" (Jonah 3:3).

After God got Jonah's attention, this time he obeyed. And a very surprising thing happened. After Jonah delivered the message, the people of Nineveh, whom God said numbered more than one hundred and twenty thousand, saw the profound error of their ways and repented. The King of Nineveh declared a fast.

How did God respond? "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and *He did not do it*" (Jonah 3:10). It was a totally unexpected outcome from Jonah's human point of view.

Brethren, let me ask you this question: do we ever doubt the power of the message that we have today all been called to deliver? When Jonah got focused and aligned himself with God's will, powerful things happened.

We are, as the Bible says, "a small flock." But make no mistake. God in these last days has given us a voice.

As we test and refine that voice on commercial television, as we continue to tap into the unparalleled opportunities on the Internet that know no national boundaries, as we publish God's truth in multiple languages, *we are exercising that voice*. Just as Jonah didn't know, we don't

know in many cases how our message will be received. But we, like Jonah, have the direct command to proclaim that message.

As I have written to you recently, we proclaim a message that involves an invisible God. While God is presently invisible to mortal man, our Church and you members are not. When the Church proclaims a way of love, of give versus get, of the power that results when one embraces the truth of the Bible, do people in the world fully see that in action? Do our thoughts, our words and our actions reflect what we say? Can people in the world—including the more than 16 million Sabbath keepers who know of us and watch us—truly see Christ living in us? Do they want what we have?

These are important questions. They concern all of us. They reflect our responsibility.

I spoke recently about the strengths of the United Church of God. Those strengths are appealing. They are inviting. And they are true. God is working in His Church today, and He is the source of those strengths. If you have not seen it yet, it is available for viewing on the Church's Web site (www.ucg.org/sermons).

In closing, let us consider the words of Paul, who wrote to the 1st century Christians in Philippi: "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

Our responsibility is before us and we have the very power of God to help us achieve it. Let us set the bar high as we approach Pentecost to rededicate ourselves to the standards of God.

And in doing so, let us *all* be about our Father's business.

In Christian Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roy Holladay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roy Holladay
Interim President
Chairman, Council of Elders