

## Sermon: 2021/01/24 (3rd Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B) - *Jonah 3:1-5,10; Psalm 62:6-14; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20\_BTR*

[Invite children to the front]

### Kids' Talk: Jonah

[Fish puppet]

We just heard a brief "snippet" of one of the Bible's most popular and familiar stories!

We're you listening?

It was about... *Jonah*.

Now, sadly, it was only an abbreviation, so we didn't hear *everything* that happened to him.

In fact, *my* favourite bit was "cut" out.

[Bring out the fish puppet.]

Can you remind us what happened?

(From the beginning.)

[Wait for response. When they get to the part about Jonah being swallowed, interrupt by "biting" one of the children with the puppet.]

Jonah deserved to be swallowed by that big fish because he disobeyed and disappointed God - by refusing to go to Nineveh in the Assyrian Empire to speak to its people; because he acted *selfishly*.

He deserved to be *eaten* - to lose his life.

But God gave him a second chance to do what was right.

And every moment we've been given on this earth is an opportunity to do the same.

Let's pray:

Lord God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

## Making Repenting My Reality

*Who's to blame?!*

Hm?

Who's to blame for the debacles and travesties we've had to endure?

Trump?

The "G. O. P."?

The "patriarchy"?

Men?

*White* men?

Or "Big Tech"?

The "Media"?

Immigrants, perhaps?

The mullahs?

Is it Biden?

B. L. M?

"Clingers," maybe?<sup>[n.1]</sup>

"Deplorables"?<sup>[n.2]</sup>

Alternatively: the universities?

And, the "Deep State"?<sup>[n.3]</sup>

You've heard all these excuses.

You've heard all these labels; these *accusations* being thrown around - slung "this" way and "that."

You've seen the fingers pointed.

You yourself have probably pointed them.

I know I have.

It's *them*; it's *their* fault.

Why won't *they* just "go home"?

Or, why won't *they* get *with* history? Can't they see that they're on the "*wrong*" "side" of it?<sup>[n.4]</sup>

Who can we "scape-goat"?

Who can we censor or intimidate?

So, I'll ask again: "Who's to blame?"

Well, Jesus has a message we need to hear in these adversarial, polarised times:  
"*[R]epent.*"

Or, as King James helpfully renders it: "*[R]epent ye*".

In other words, stop looking for others to say "sorry" and *be* sorry yourself.

Because *you're* to blame.

And me too.

*Everyone* is.

*Every* one one of us has contributed to the world being *not* as it could be;  
*not* as it *should* be.

Now, sometimes it is hard to see how that is true.

Firstly, because we're masters of self-delusion.

Secondly, though, because some of the presenting problems that our societies and our families face seem *sooo(!)* massive, *sooo(!)* monstrous, *sooo(!)* nebulous that it is easy to say to oneself: *that* thing isn't of *my* making.

That thing has long preexisted me;

its origin is ancient;

its origin is foreign.

But *wait(!)* - we're doing it again.

No, the likelihood is that, by-and-large, if we were to look more closely;

if we were to look more *honestly*,

that we *would* find that some of the moral responsibility *is* our own.

Take China, for example.

*Whatever* you think of the man, our previous president was *absolutely* right to recently categorise that country's treatment of the Uighurs as "genocide."

The Uighurs, if you don't know, are an Islamic, Turkic people living in the arid foothills of the Himalayas in the far north-west of the country.

And they are suffering appalling cruelties and horrors "under the boot" of the ruling Communist regime:

they have been, you see, singled out because, yes, they're ethnically distinct from the majority population, *but*, more than this, they've been singled out because of their religion -

because their religion stands as an obstacle to the dreadful atheistic ideology of the government.

And look how easy it is to see *their* sin! (The C.C.P, that is.)

But *I* am paying for it.

Quite literally.

And so are you.

Every consumer-good we buy made in China is funding the mistreatment of the Uighurs.

Is paying for them to be loaded onto train-cars and deported to concentration camps.

Is paying for their women to be forcibly sterilised;

their children to be "re-homed;"

their babies to be aborted;

the beards of their men to be shaved off;

their Qur'ans to be confiscated and destroyed: [n.5].

*My* television, *my* iPhone, *my* ESPN subscription, even the garlic in my pasta-sauce(!) - the list goes on and on...

Nearly every purchase through Amazon, Wal-Mart and the like helps to perpetuate these crimes against humanity taking place *right now* (as I preach this sermon).

Crimes comparable to those of Nazi Germany.

And it isn't enough to "beat my chest."

It isn't enough to *feel* repentant for my role; for my *culpability* in this situation.

Rather, the answer is to be, as much as is possible, like the Ninevehites - the Ninevehites who took positive, *sweeping* action and, as the passage says, 'turned from their evil ways': [Jon. 3:10].

The answer, in other words, is to make repenting my reality.

Which won't happen all at once, right away.

Because, sadly, we're almost certainly a more stiff-necked people than the Assyrians! [ref. Ex. 32:9; 2 Chron. 30:8; Acts 7:51]

They got it *immediately*.

Indeed, at "face-value" it's just *too* incredible *how* quickly they changed: how ready they were to listen;

their astonishing responsiveness - I see this as (more) evidence that (the Book of) *Jonah* is *not*, in fact, a historical text but actually a humorous *fable*, which would have had its original (Israelite) audience laughing out loud: [n.6]

After all, in the verses we skipped, even the animals of the city are described 'cover[ing themselves] with sackcloth' [Jon. 3:8] when they heard the prophet's message.

It's a slapstick, over-the-top, Monty Python-esque farce, which was probably read aloud with lampoonish, theatrical gesticulation and in a gravely melodramatic voice.

But the point it was making - and comedy is sometimes a powerful medium for conveying uncomfortable truths - was *deadly* serious:

For, as Paul (the Apostle) warns us, the 'wages' - the consequences - of divine displeasure that we're incurring is '*death*': [Rom. 6:23].

So, let's get the diagnosis right first - that'll help: which is that, *I* am to blame.

*I* am a sinner, 'under [the Lord's] wrath': [Ps. 90:9].

And *then* we can start the "treatment" -

What does that look like?

This "treatment."

Well, last week I told you that [keeping] "The Law" wasn't necessary for salvation. And that's true.

We are not *required* to do anything except put our faith in the Savior as Lord. For *Jesus* has done everything *necessary* to grant us access to the Kingdom He mentions has 'come near' - "Heaven," as we normally call it.

But if it has 'come near' - and let's be clear what we're talking about, which is a *literal* reign of Christ *on the earth* (as opposed to a mere *spiritual* one), then I'll *want* to begin conforming myself to its mores - that is to say, to the values and ideals *reflected* in the Law; *underlying* it.

It is about *citizenship*, then.

One *swears* fealty to the nation that they hope to belong to:  
you've seen it - men and women standing in rows in front of an American flag,  
their right hands raised.  
But citizenship can be rescinded.  
Revoked.  
Or terminated.  
It can be something I say I have, and even evidenced on a slip of paper or a  
passport, but it also has to be *lived*.

After all, imagine this scenario:  
imagine I was from the U.K. - which is easy: that's true - just listen to my accent -  
and I was granted residency here in the U.S., and I went to the effort of travelling  
from my hometown to London to the embassy, for interviews and lots of queuing;  
that I dutifully completed piles of paperwork;  
that I had health check-ups and the prescribed vaccinations...  
That I travelled up and down the country on trains, back-and-forth.  
(And I did, in fact, do all these things.)  
That I paid the not-insignificant fees for all the bureaucracy involved, and then  
stayed put.  
That I never *actually* got on the plane.  
Never *actually* ate hamburgers or attended a football game or threw a baseball or  
whatever *being* American looks like.  
You would say something was amiss, wouldn't you?  
That something was...fishy.  
Broken.

Or imagine I *did* get on the plane but when I arrived I built myself a house that  
looked *exactly* like a replica of Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle, and I flew  
St. George's flag from the ramparts and I drove around on the left side of the road  
like a maniac - which is to say the *right* side, and drank my beer at room-  
temperature, and dressed in the "redcoat" uniform of George (the) 3rd's  
expeditionary forces, and loudly sang God Save the Queen out of my window in  
the early hours of the morning...  
You would say something was amiss, wouldn't you?  
That something was...fishy.  
Broken.  
Because, if only instinctively - by your God-given intuition, you would understand  
that there is a difference between one merely *claiming* that they were a citizen of  
this nation, and embracing the *reality* of such.

This is why I said to you: the answer is to *make* repenting my reality.  
And why would I do this?  
Why would I go to the trouble of not just *saying* sorry but *being* sorry and

examining and changing my habits, my routine, my politics, *my spending-habits?* (Which is what I mean by "*making* repenting my reality.")

Well, because of the 'good news' that Jesus referred to:

the 'good news' about His Kingdom-which-is-near.

About the fact that He's going to take back control, and rule directly - a paradise, a new Jerusalem, a place of endless peace and health and happiness.

*That's* a place whose citizenship is worth having, no?

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, amen.

#### Footnotes:

1. See: Betz, Bradford (18th of November, 2020), 'Obama says controversy over infamous 'bitter' comments about small-town Americans still "nags at me"', *Fox News*, available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/obama-controversy-infamous-bitter-comments-small-town-americans-still-nags-me>, (accessed January 23, 2021).
2. See: Chozick, Amy (10th of September, 2016), 'Hillary Clinton Calls Many Trump Backers 'Deplorables,' and G.O.P. Pounces', *The New York Times*, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/11/us/politics/hillary-clinton-basket-of-deplorables.html>, (accessed January, 23).
3. See: Abramson, Alana (8th of March, 2017), 'President Trump's Allies Keep Talking About the 'Deep State.' What's That?', *Time*, available at <https://time.com/4692178/donald-trump-deep-state-breitbart-barack-obama/>, (accessed January 23, 2021).
4. See, for example: Key, Pam (17th of November, 2020), 'CNN's Lemon: Trump Supporters Will End Up 'Embarrassed' — Grandkids Will See You Were on the Wrong Side of History', *Breitbart*, <https://www.breitbart.com/clips/2020/11/17/cnns-lemon-trump-supporters-will-end-up-embarrassed-grandkids-will-see-you-were-on-the-wrong-side-of-history/>, (accessed January 23, 2021).
5. See: Curtis, Michael (21st of December, 2020), 'Is China Committing Genocide Against the Uighur People?', *American Thinker*, available at [https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2020/12/is\\_china\\_committing\\_genocide\\_against\\_the\\_uighur\\_people.html](https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2020/12/is_china_committing_genocide_against_the_uighur_people.html), (accessed January 23, 2021).
6. See: Burrows, Millar (1970), 'The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah', in Frank & Reed (Eds.), *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May*, Nashville, T. N.; New York, N. Y.: Abingdon Press, pp. 80-107; Holbert, John C. (1981), 'Deliverance Belongs To Yahweh! Satire in the Book of Jonah', *J. S. O. T.*, Volume 6, No. 21, pp. 59-81; Bolin, Thomas M. (1995), 'Jonah as Subversive literature? The Book of Jonah

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Miles, John A., Jr. (January, 1975), 'Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody',  
*The Jewish Quarterly Review: New Series*, Volume 65, No. 3, pp. 168-181;  
Band, Arnold J. (1990), 'Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody," *Prooftexts*,  
Volume 10, No. 2, pp. 177-95.