

Warrina Valley - 23rd October 2003
(Jonah)

Plagiarising remarks from two different peoples'...
“Welcome to the chapel of the Village People!”

Our gathering together here is something that has been on my heart, and discussed many times with Ross and Will, for well over two years.

So it is wonderful to finally stand here and greet you today and see an established group of saints, prepared to mutually care for each other.

Let us start with an old favourite hymn, composed in the Ronda Valley - or “Cwm Ronda” in Welsh - hence its name - by three Cambrian brethren named Williams, Williams, and Hughes, using Psalm 48:14 for inspiration, the translation with which they would have been most familiar reads...

“For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.”

The original Welsh starts off “Welen sevyll rwng yr myrtwydd” - which we might know better perhaps as “Guide me O Thou Great Jehovah”. We shall sing in English :)

Those of us who are familiar with singing in harmony parts might like to be encouraged to do so.

44 Cwm Ronda (AHB 478) Guide me O thou Great Jehovah (2m30)

ask for someone to open with prayer

Jonah. Yonah in Hebrew, Ionas in Greek. Yunus in Arabic and Aramaic... and it means “dove” - the symbol which many Christians and their denominations have adopted in their logotype, the bird which is said to represent peace.

Hebrew tradition says Jonah was probably the son of the widow Zarephath who Elijah raised from the dead in I Kings, during King Ahab's reign. If so, perhaps God caused Elijah to raise her specifically to rear this son who was to have a remarkable effect on a heathen nation.

Display Orme's sketch.

This is a water-colour sketch made by my late uncle Orme, a regular soldier who served between the world wars in Iraq.

The picture is entitled “Sketch for oil painting: Nebi Yunis on the site of Esarhaddon’s palace in the ruins of Nineveh, near Mosul Iraq”

As it is passed around I’ll offer some explanation...

It is signed in 1932, and there has been considerable building construction all round Nebi Yunus since then, over the last 70 years.

Nebi Yunus is Arabic for the burial place of Jonah. Like Nebi Shemuel - the burial place of the prophet Samuel, also located on a hilltop which is to the northwest of Jerusalem.

Esarhaddon. He was the son of King Senacherib of Assyria, and succeeded him to the throne.

In turn, his son - Assurbanipal - succeeded him, and it was near the end of his reign that Ninevah was wiped out by completely unexpected flood waters from the River Tigris - as predicted by the prophet Nahum.

The flood breached the city walls for a considerable distance which allowed disenchanted militants under Nabopolassar to destroy the city around 615BC, leaving it worse than rubble, something that Titus, son of Vespasian did to Jerushalayim almost 700 years later in 70AD.

Okay, that is the background.

Jonah’s mission was to Ninevah in the northern part of what we now know as Iraq, late in Jereboam’s reign in the northern breakaway apostate Jewish kingdom of Israel.

Some scholars claim the book is a work of fiction, written purely to illustrate a point. If one checks what Jesus says about Jonah in Matthew 12 and Luke 11, I believe we see that Jesus totally accepted the account as it was written.

I’m not a scholar, and I do accept that the bible is to be taken seriously, believing (without any argument) in what it says, and therefore I am prepared to give Jesus the benefit of the doubt - not that there is any doubt in my mind.

Reading from Luke 11 in the NRSV, with Jesus speaking:

“This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation”.

I have divided the narrative into four parts...

Part 1 comprises two sections...

1. Jonah’s rebellion and disobedience -
2. God humours him briefly - and then acts decisively

Chapter 1: 1-3 NRSV

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me”.

But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

Where is Tarshish? A copper smelting and trading port on the east coast of Spain, as far away from the Holy Land as one could get in those days, without going out into the great unknown through what later was called the “Pillars of Hercules”.

We know the story, God sends a storm, the sailors discover Jonah was the cause, he is thrown overboard and the ship is then safe, and Jonah gets swallowed by the whale.

Part 2.

summary: God puts him in solitary confinement to consider his position

Chapter 2:1-4 NRSV

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying, “I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight...’”

One of the objections raised by scholars is that Jonah prayed from inside the fish. It seems they didn't like him not asking God to let out of his prison, but that he merely praised God for his being saved from drowning.

Perhaps those scholars were unable to put themselves into the mind of someone actually in a prison cell... those involved in prison ministry tell us that inmates who genuinely convert to Christianity have little interest in their own situation - but pray for others. This was Jonah's prayer from inside his unusual prison cell...

verses 7-10 NRSV

"As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Deliverance belongs to the LORD!"

Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

If we think being swallowed by a large fish is impossible, I wonder how many of us remember a news item from maybe the late 1970s telling of someone who was discovered washed up on a beach, who had extensive acid burns all over their body... and who claimed they had been swallowed by such a creature?

Seriously I ask, is nothing impossible with a totally omnipotent God? Or maybe one could ask...

"are we putting an omnipotent God into a box of our own construction?"

Part 3

Chapter 3:1-3 NKJV

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."

So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.

Another scholarly suggestion is that the story is a fable because of the described size of Ninevah. The Amplified translation points out that a 3 days journey round the circumference was 20 miles, which means the city was about 6 miles across, which isn't huge by Sydney, New York or London's standards. Ninevah was the capital city of one of the most powerful nations in the region, and its inhabitants did not live on quarter-acre blocks - many complete families lived in one house with several floors.

Chapter 3:4-10 NKJV

Jonah began to enter the city on his first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

Word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes, and he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles...

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and He relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

The king of Assyria at that time was Ashurdan III, and notes I have read suggest that God had already sent two plagues in 765 and 759, and a total solar eclipse in 763 to prepare him and the people for his unlikely looking prophet. God is mighty, and when He makes a decision, man cannot stand in the way.

I ask you to picture this man, covered in sores caused by the stomach acid of the whale... preaching the message of "repent NOW or hell fire and brimstone will result"... I think he would have been an inspiring sight...

Let's break for a song and conclude the story of Jonah after

30 Diademata (AHB 163) Crown Him with Many Crowns - the Lamb upon the throne...

What a beautiful glimpse of heaven John the beloved apostle had of the Throne of God with the Lamb centre stage... you know there are many who don't find John's revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ given him while he was in prison on Patmos to be unintelligible. (2m30 hymn)

I suspect the saints of the time of the authors of that hymn, a hundred and fifty years ago, would have been able to visualise what Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring wrote.

Unfortunately some of the original words have been changed in our song books, which seems to alter the punch of what they really say; the excluded verses really seem to me to reduce our understanding of the enormous power and presence of God. Listen to this...

**Crown Him, the Son of God before the worlds began:
And ye who tread where he hath trod Crown Him the son of Man;
Who every grief hath known that wrings the human breast,
and takes and bears them for his own,
that all in Him may rest.**

**Crown Him, the Lord of Peace,
Whose power a sceptre sways from pole to pole,
That wars may cease, absorbed in prayer and praise:
His reign shall know no end,
and round his pierced feet fair flowers of paradise extend their
fragrance ever sweet.**

**Crown Him the Lord of years,
the potentate - the king or ruler - of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres - the heavenly bodies,
ineffably sublime - too great for any words -
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For Thou hast died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity.**

Let us stand to stretch ourselves, and sing...

Back to Jonah... Part 4

One would have thought that Jonah would have been pleased that the people had listened to him after all the troubles he been through!

But no, he was just like me and you - he was annoyed because things hadn't gone HIS way.

He actually expected God to wipe them off the face of the planet, even though they had repented.

Chapter 4:1-4 NRSV

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said,

“O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.

And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

And the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

God had to pull Jonah back into line again... like He has always had to do to all His chosen people - including us. He sat Jonah down and preached to him, after enforcing a 24 hour period while he lived inside a parable!

Chapter 4:5-11 NRSV

he was Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of it, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush.

But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.

Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

I can see glimpses of Jonah’s attitude of unbelief and pride in myself.

If we are all honest with ourselves, the rest of us probably do too.

We can ponder that thought while we get organised to close with song -
and a benediction - literally a “good word” - which I’ll read from the
Amplified Bible’s rendering of the end portion of Jude’s gospel.

Doxology (AHB 573) - Bottom of page 158, the tune known as the “Old
hundredth”, the name coming from a tune already old in the 1500s, to
which Psalm 100 likely would have frequently been chanted.

Let’s repeat that with just the starting note from the piano, and sing it
with just our voices, which I have heard described as the greatest
musical instruments God ever designed... (1m10 hymn)

Benediction

*Now to Him Who is able to keep you without stumbling, slipping or
falling, and to present you unblemished, blameless and faultless
before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy and exultation,
that is to say unspeakable, ecstatic delight -*

*To the one only God, our Saviour, through Christ our Lord, be glory
or splendour, majesty might and dominion, and power and authority,
before all time, and now, and forever - unto all the ages of eternity -
so be it - Amen.*

08:06 20-10-03

open	1m	18
hymn	2m	30
teach1	9m	35
intro	2m	00
hymn	2m	30
teach2	4m	30
hymn	1m	10
close1m	00	
total	24m	33