

**Zoom Service Orphir/Stenness 24.01.21 Epiph 3B
Transcript:**

Introduction and Prayer – Martin

Good morning, wherever you are.

It's good to speak to you again.

"We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship." [National Worship Team]

Today we think about life changes, and how we respond to Jesus

As Jesus called the disciples to be fishers of men, so he calls us to follow him, to trust in him, rely on him, and have confidence in him.

Come, let offer ourselves in worship and praise.

Hymn 489 Come down O love divine

1 Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

2 O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

3 And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace,
till Love create a place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

Opening Prayer: *I am using a Prayer by David Ogston*

Let us pray:

Where God is this morning,
though the heavens cannot contain Him,
is where there is separation, loss and void.

Where God is this morning,
though we cannot know His mind,
is where there is somebody's cross,
and somebody pinned to it.

Where God is this morning,
though none can be sure they see it,
is where the sparrow has fallen,
and He has borne witness.

Where God is this morning,
though empires should rise and fail,
is not in the boasted pomp and show,
but the still, small voice of the weak.

Where God is this morning,
though He has countless days in store,
is where there are precious minutes left before the nurses are called.
Where God is this morning,
though quiet and slow their coming,
is where the doves are descending with healing in their wings.

Where God is this morning,
though the tongues of fire are gentle,
is where the courage comes
to do the difficult thing.

Where God is this morning,
though the day seems far,
is there where the prayer for peace takes flesh and bone.
Where God is this morning,
though the cynic does not know it,
is where love stands firm,
be it ever so wounded and torn.

Where God is this morning,
though we have not known it,
is here where we name Him,
and listen in silence.

Where God is this morning,
though we are all too slow,
we would follow Him in faith
to the promised day. Amen

Let us join in the Lord's Prayer:

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.*

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

*For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

1st Reading: Jonah 3:1-5, 10

Conversion of Nineveh

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.
at Verse 10:

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Hymn: 553 Just as I am

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that your blood was shed for me,
and that you ask me, "Come to me",
O Lamb of God, I come,

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come,.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come,

2nd Reading: Mark 1: 14-20

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Message:

Nowadays people change direction in life quite frequently. Many have several careers. Today's readings are about changing direction in life. Jonah is obliged to change direction, and the disciples abandon their fishing careers to follow Jesus.

The story of Jonah and the 'whale' is one of the best known in the Bible. Never mind the arguments about whether a whale really could swallow a man, or whether a man could exist in its belly for three days without dying from lack of oxygen, or being digested. The Bible refers to a "great fish", not a whale, yet folk still speculate about whether it means a whale or a shark or a specially created fish.

All this misses the point!

This story is neither historical nor scientific, never meant to be taken literally. It's a parable – or an allegory, a literary masterpiece, but with powerful lessons.

You know the story. Nineveh was a huge city in what is now northern Iraq; the capital city of the Assyrians, sworn enemies of the Jews.

God orders Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell the people what wicked sinners they are. Jonah is feart. Doesna want to go. Takes passage on a ship going in the other direction.

God's not best pleased, & sends a big storm. The sailors reckon that the storm is because there's a sinner aboard, and they cast lots to find out who it is.

The lot falls to Jonah. He confesses, and tells them that if they throw him overboard the storm will cease. The sailors try their best to avoid sacrificing Jonah, but eventually they throw him overboard, and the storm calms down.

Then

"the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah; and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights."

In the belly of the fish Jonah prays to the Lord – *for the first time* - and the fish spews him up on dry land.

Now we come to today's reading.

This time, despite his fears, Jonah does as he is told, and goes to Nineveh.

To his astonishment, he has hardly entered the city and begun to preach when the people of Nineveh believe him, and everybody, king and animals and all, repent and do penance for their sins.

God decides to give Nineveh a second chance. Now it's Jonah who's not best pleased. **God has changed his mind**, and Jonah is left looking like a false prophet who got it wrong. He doesn't like the idea that God's love and forgiveness are open to *everyone*, and not just to the people of Israel, and he takes the poots. He goes and sits in the shade, hoping that, after all, God will destroy the city.

God makes a bush grow to give Jonah more shade. Jonah is pleased, but never thinks to say thanks. God appoints a worm to kill the bush, and a hot wind to make Jonah more uncomfortable. Although he is actually no worse off than before, he starts moaning again. God asks him: *"If I was compassionate enough to ease your discomfort for a while, should I not be compassionate to this great city?"*

What's this all about? The Book of Jonah is very short – you can read it later.

Overall, it is a powerful statement of the universal love and the forgiving grace of God, which is available to us all.

It has many lessons - about selfishness and exclusiveness and gratitude and response to God. It reminds us that we can't run away from God!

In Psalm 139, which we read last week, the Psalmist asks: (NCV):

Where can I go to get away from your Spirit? Where can I run from you?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there.

If I lie down in the grave, you are there.

If I rise with the sun in the east and settle in the west beyond the sea, even there you would guide me.

With your right hand you would hold me.

Here is the God who is all around us and within us; the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

The Jonah story raises interesting questions about whether God can, or will, change his mind, and that leads us to think about the Genesis story of Abraham and Isaac; about the stories in Amos and Hosea and elsewhere about God changing his mind¹; about the story of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman.

It makes us ask, how is it that a just God can forgive sins? Can he really let sin go unpunished?

¹ Amos 7: 3; 7:6; Hosea 11; 2 Samuel 24:16, etc

It reminds us that the God of justice is also the God of love, who chooses to be merciful. It reminds us of the love of God expressed in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Jesus came, not to *change* God's attitude to men and women, but to *demonstrate* God's attitude – to show us, at the cost of the cross, what God is like.²

By his death on the cross, Jesus is saying, "*There is nothing in all the world that you can do to me that will stop me loving you.*"

And what Jesus says, God says.

Remember, Jesus said:

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)

Our lives are precious to God. Jesus demonstrates that we are loved – loved without condition, loved without limit, loved beyond measure.

The take-home message from our readings today is twofold.

God sometimes gives us jobs to do that we don't want to do, or think we can't do. We need to remember that if God is with us there is nothing we cannot do.

Secondly, God calls on ordinary people to do his work. Jonah is just an ordinary bloke, but he fulfils God's purpose.

Today's reading from Mark is about Jesus calling the first four apostles. All ordinary people: not educated people, influential people, experts in the Jewish scriptures, or experienced public speakers. No: four ordinary fishermen.

They left all that they had, and the world hasn't been the same since.

The world can be changed by ordinary people.

As Paul asks, 'If God is for us, who is against us?' (Rom. 8:31)

The lesson of Jonah, and of these four apostles, is ...

do not underestimate yourselves!

We, all of us, have different abilities and different talents.

We are given them by God, and we are called upon to use them in God's service.

Later today, think about Jonah; about Simon and Andrew, and James and John.

Ask yourself what job God is calling you to do in this place, and in this world.

Ask yourself how you will respond.

Then don't tell me. Tell God. Amen. SDG.

Hymn 644 O Jesus I have promised

1 O Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end;
Be thou forever near me,
My Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If thou wilt be my guide.

2 O let me feel thee near me!
The world is ever near:
I see the sights that dazzle,

The tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, draw thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

3 O let me hear thee speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou guardian of my soul.

4 O Jesus, thou hast promised
To all who follow thee
That where thou art in glory
There shall thy servant be.
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my friend.

Prayer for Others and Blessing

Let us pray.

We bring to God our prayers for people everywhere
who are in any way affected by Covid 19,
those who treat them and care for them;
all who decide policy; our own government,
and also the new administration in USA.

May God strengthen all those who have not enough hours in the day
to do all that is asked of them,
and those who find their days unbearably long.

May God in his kindness guide those who have come to the hour of decision,
where there is no turning back, and no second chance.

In the hours of darkness, may God be a friend to those who work while the rest of us
sleep, especially all who respond, at a moment's notice, to illness, danger or distress.

We pray that God will uphold all those who are counting the hours until the news they
await brings dread or delight,
despair or reprieve.

We ask God's blessing upon all those who give hours of their time
to the needy, the overlooked people, the ones who have nothing, save gratitude only.
And to those who are near to the hour of their death, may God in his love bring peace at
the last, and a quiet end.

We pray for all those known to us who are in special need at this time.

Pause

May they know the love, the guidance, and the strength of God.

For all those who may be sharing with us in this time of worship,
we ask God's encouragement.

May we all know the fellowship of the baptized,
and of all who walk in the ways of Christ.

And may there be hours in all our lives this week
when our spirits rise, and our hearts expand,
and we know again that, in Jesus Christ our Lord,
God has made us free.

In his name we ask. Amen. *(Based on a prayer by David Ogston)*

Now may you stay safe in the way of Christ;

in the middle and muddle of our daily lives, may you hear his call, recognize his voice,
and respond to his invitation to follow him;

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you, now and evermore. Amen.