

Worship At Home

28th January 2024

Psalm 62:5-8

God, the one and only— I'll wait as long as he says. Everything I hope for comes from him, so why not?

He's solid rock under my feet, breathing room for my soul, An impregnable castle: I'm set for life.

My help and glory are in God —granite-strength and safe-harbour-God— So, trust him absolutely, people; lay your lives on the line for him. God is a safe place to be.



Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 755 Be still and know

- 1 Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
Be still and know that I am God.
- 2 I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
I am the Lord who saves and heals.
- 3 In you, Lord God, I put my trust.
In you, Lord God, I put my trust.
In you, Lord God, I put my trust.



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Let us pray,

Here I am, Lord God, ready for you. Here I am, coming in worship and silence. Hold a period of quiet, you might like to read these words several times over. I wait in the stillness, my soul is like water, Pushed and pulled by the gravity of life's commitments. I pour myself out, bend myself, and distort myself for others, muddying myself into something that isn't authentic.

Refresh and refill me, O God, For you alone my soul waits in silence. I wait in the stillness, keeping my faith alight, sometimes only barely. May my faith be a fire that brings comfort, one that radiates love and care to those around me; Rekindle and fuel me, O God, For you alone my soul waits in silence. I wait in the stillness, the silence amongst the chaos. The sounds of the traffic, the appliances, the crowds, the all-encompassing dirge of life. May I be aware of the still, quiet voice, Speaking words of wisdom. My hope is in you God, For you alone my soul waits in silence.

Amen.

MEDITATION (based on Jonah 3: 1-5,10)

The word of the Lord came to Jonah saying Go. Now. At once.

Jonah fled in the opposite direction. The word of the Lord came to Simon and Andrew, James and John and immediately they responded by following Jesus.

Who are we? Reluctant Jonah's or eager disciples? Who me? Questioned Jonah of God To Nineveh? ..not likely, today, or any day. They're evil outsiders, with strange customs and creeds - me help them - no way.

'Pure' hesitant Jonah, didn't want to believe that God's mercy - so deep, wide and gracious, embraces people of different races!

Jonah's story - parabolic, but clear illustrates why God's call to reach out to foreigners filled Jonah with fear.

Poor desperate Jonah convinced he could leave the presence of God, set sail for Tarshish, - the tempestuous storm, and, of course, the great fish,

God's persistent call came once more to a seaweed-crowned Jonah, spewed up on the shore, who, not surprisingly, got up and went to Nineveh with the call to repent. The call was successful much to Jonah's dismay for God's mercy and love were not Jonah's way.

How about us? What do we do and say? This story of Jonah is included in Scripture to challenge with questions about race and culture. How inclusive are we, in this land we call home if colour and eyes don't mirror our own?

How tolerant and just - to those who look and seem different - from us. Do we condemn others and God, in Jonah-like anger over evil and war, unemployment and hunger?

Calling on God to make people care to love one another, to heal and to share the resources we have with all who have needs.

But aren't we to image God's words and God's deeds?

When Jesus proclaimed the good news of God he said to all who would hear

"Repent and believe the good news."

"The kingdom of God has come near"

'And Jesus saw Simon, and his brother Andrew, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John, and said to them, "follow me" 'and immediately they left what they were doing and followed him.' Jesus' call to follow him is a call to you and to me whoever we are, whatever we do however young, however old... How do we hear and respond to his call..... As reluctant Jonah's, or as eager disciples?

(take some time to reflect on what you have just read.)

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 124 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

- 1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation;
praise God, my soul, for in him are your health and salvation;
come all who hear, Into his presence draw near, joining in glad adoration.
- 2 Praise to the Lord, who in all things is wondrously reigning,
shields you from harm and is gently yet firmly sustaining.
Have you not seen how your heart's wishes have been granted by God's wise
ordaining?
- 3 Praise to the Lord, who with blessing and power will defend you;
surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend you;
ponder anew what the Almighty can do: God will for ever befriend you.
- 4 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that has life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the Amen sound from God's people again: gladly for ever adore him.

<https://youtu.be/BNqOWtMSmIY?si=WdLqzkHdmuknC-rE>

Reading: Mark 1:14-20

Reflection: Turning around

When one reads the story of Jonah, one can't help smiling over the angry little prophet, sulking under the castor oil plant. The story lends itself to our imagination and it must be one of the most familiar stories in the whole bible because of its imagery.



I'm reminded of an experience which I had in a primary school class many years ago which bears out the familiarity of Jonah's story. I was playing a word game with the pupils to find out the extent of their biblical knowledge. I would say a name and they would respond with the first word that came into their heads. The name Daniel produced ten Boones, 5 lions and 3 Elton Johns. About half the class knew that David had killed a giant but only one boy knew it had been with a slingshot and stones - another strongly disputed this because he was sure that David had used a bow and arrow!

However, when it came to Jonah - they all said whale! No one knew much more than the fact that Jonah had either jumped, fallen or been pushed off a ship in a storm and that the whale had swallowed him up and carried him to dry land. Definitely a story that appeals to the imagination, of all ages and generations.



It is a storyteller's story with one of the Old Testament's most prophetic messages - the repudiation of exclusivism - whether religious, theological, ethnic, political, national. It really is very significant that this reading from the internationally used set of bible readings for this Sunday in Epiphany because, as we hear these ancient words addressed to the situation where people believed themselves to be racially or religiously superior - it calls our thoughts and actions into question if we are in any way guilty of thinking ourselves superior in any shape or form - particularly in the two categories which the story addresses - religious or racial.

The story of Jonah is the Old Testament version of the kind of story which Jesus told so well - the parable. In this parable, the author rebukes with charm and humour a claim made amongst his people in Jerusalem - and, sadly, by people of every age, the claim of exclusivism and superiority. In the case of Jonah, it is a claim with special theological overtones, challenging the belief that WE have God in OUR camp, on OUR team, on OUR side - that WE have a formula, a ritual, a programme that guarantees God's exclusively favourable relationship with us. The story of Jonah cheerfully and brilliantly and unrelentingly proclaims the central word of God's boundless love, and it does so by means of an inspired series of images. To the pious protest which proclaims that God is contained in buildings of specific design and architecture, Jonah's author simply laughs, "Don't be ridiculous," he says, "here is God now, receiving praise in the most unlikely place of all - the belly of a great fish swimming in the sea."

To all claims of God's exclusive love and concern for one people (or one class, or one colour, or one gender, or one race) this storyteller replies: "Don't be ridiculous - for here is God now loving the most unlikely of all people - the Assyrians - murderers from the Israelites' point of view - plunderers - and a godless race." The interesting thing about the book of Jonah, however, is that the prophet himself never does repent, and yet, throughout the book, he is the constant recipient of God's mercy. Given the call to go to Nineveh, he sets out in the opposite direction. Thrown overboard by the sailors, he is saved by God through the big fish. And then, patiently, painstakingly, never in anger, God deals with the angry prophet - once again sending him to Nineveh - giving him success in his mission, overlooking his sulking, shading his head, working through worm and sun and explanation, to teach Jonah the marvels of mercy and the unlimited nature of love.

Jonah does not repent, but God never gives up on him. Jonah shows that God can bring even the most hard-hearted people to repentance as it also demonstrates that God can use the most reluctant prophet or disciple for the most difficult of tasks. Even you and me. For that we can say - 'Thank you to God!'



Let us pray,

God of now and always, you are our refuge and our shelter:

To you we can bring our concerns and our joy: With your Spirit we can overcome fear and respond to your call with courage: With you by our side we can be more than we ever thought we could be: Enrich our vision and soften our hearts, we pray.

God of the past and of the future, we bring to you in prayer those people and places on our hearts today: We remember the parts of the world where people are being killed, oppressed and displaced. We pray especially for the people of Tigray in Ethiopia, for the people of Dafur in the Sudan, for the Uighur peoples in China. May those in power leave behind violence and follow your call to peace.

Lord Jesus, you called fisherman as they worked, so we pray for fisherman today as they struggle to make a living. We pray for all those who work to bring food to our table as they struggle with the complexities of legislation and the challenges of extreme weather. And may those who exploit or abuse leave behind cruelty and follow your call to compassion.

We pray for all young people caught up in and trapped by gang violence, for those who have been stabbed or shot and for their families, for those who live in fear of being attacked, for those who have been imprisoned, who have committed murder - and for their families, for all those who carry weapons. Help them to leave behind despair and to follow your call to hope. We pray for one another, for our church families, our communities, and our loved ones, for those who feel overwhelmed by the challenges of each day, for those adapting to new ways of living, for those who are ill, for those close to death, for those who are grieving.

Help us all to leave behind all that separates us from you and from one another and to follow your call to trust and to love - in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 555: Amazing Grace

- 1 Amazing grace! how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.
- 2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!
- 3 Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.
- 4 The Lord has promised good to me, his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.
- 5 Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, and mortal life shall cease:
I shall possess, within the veil, a life of joy and peace.
- 6 When I've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun,
I've no less days to sing God's praise, than when I'd first begun.

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<https://youtu.be/zG3wOKWYYAA?si=M-KBoRsvT7XFYB2>

Go in peace - seek the opportunities to love. Go in joy and be one of the people who bring hope. Travel well in the world and be transformed by the Spirit within you. Amen. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.

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If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you. 4