

## **Morning Service 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2025**

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## Notices

### Call to Worship

In the vastness of the universe, God has called us here to this place in this hour. And so we come, to close our minds to everything except our love for and thanksgiving to God, for He alone is worthy of all our mind, all our heart, all our energy, all our voices and listening, in worship and adoration to Jesus, lover of our soul.

### Prayer

Lord of the morning, we awake to this new day with all its possibilities, its and uncertainties.

May we be able, in Your strength, to move through this day not with anger or bitterness, but full of grace and compassion, so that when we meet our neighbour of encounter a stranger, we may recognise in them Your face.

Lord of life we celebrate Your countless gifts to us:

Yet above all, we celebrate Your coming among us, walking our roads, calling our names, enfolding our lives, inviting us to You.

Jesus Lord of every new day, we offer You our lives and in our limited words, we affirm our faith, in confidence and prayerful hope. Amen.

- **Hymn – ‘If I were a butterfly’**

### Jonah

There's a story in the bible about a man named Jonah, which like the song we've just sung, involves a fish!

Jonah was a prophet and one day, God said to him, 'Jonah, I want you to go to Ninevah in the east \*\* and tell the people that if they don't stop being so wicked and cruel, I'll destroy their city in 40 days!'. But Jonah didn't want to go to that horrid city and those nasty people, so instead, he got in a boat \*\* and sailed away as far as he could go to the west \*\* opposite direction. Silly Jonah \*\*

But God really, really did want him to go to Ninevah so God sent a mighty storm around that ship. Everyone was tossed this way and that \*\*. The sailors tried throwing all the cargo off the ship \*\* to see if that helped, but the storm just got worse \*\*. Jonah was asleep below deck \*\*!! The captain went and shook him awake \*\* and Jonah soon realised he was the cause of the storm. The sailors were terrified \*\* but Jonah told them that if they threw him overboard \*\*, the storm would calm \*\*. So that's what they did, threw Jonah overboard, splish \*\*. And the storm calmed and the waters became still.

So there was Jonah, in the water, swimming for all he was worth \*\*. But he wasn't a very good swimmer and soon he began to sink \*\*. Down and down he went and just when he thought that was it whomph, God sent a great fish \*\* which swallowed him whole \*\*!

Can you imagine what it's like inside a great big fish's tummy? Yukky, slimy, dark \*\*. But, he was alive and he prayed his thanks to God \*\*, said how sorry he was for being disobedient, and promised to go to Ninevah as God has asked him to.

Do you know what happened next? Well, having a Jonah in your tum gave that great big fish an awful tummy ache \*\* so when it swam nearer the land, God made it spit Jonah out onto the sand. So Jonah was alive and on dry land again, yaaaay \*\*. Jonah did go to Ninevah and instead of being nasty to Jonah, they listened to what God told him to say \*\*. And a wonderful thing happened, all those people did stop being wicked and cruel and came before God in sorrow and repentance, and God forgave them all.

- **Hymn – ‘Jesus’ love is very wonderful’ X2**

### **Grace as kids leave**

#### **Offering and Prayer**

Lord God, You shower us with Your abundance, and from that abundance we give. You have created this world a world of plenty for all, yet people live in lack. Father God, take these offerings we ask, Holy Spirit move in those You have chosen to administer this money, that it may go with our love to those You love who are in greatest need. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

We’re going to continue in prayer as we say the Lord’s Prayer together, but remember prayer is a conversation with a person, the person of the Lord God, it’s not just a set of words we learn by rote and chant out once a week in church. So let’s offer our prayer to our heavenly Father:

Our Father, who lives in heaven

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen.

#### **Talk 1**

A Sunday school teacher was telling the story of how Jonah disobeyed God and ended up being swallowed by a big fish. For three days, he cried out from the depths of the ocean, and after three days and nights, God ordered the fish to spit him up on the beach. At the end of the lesson, the teacher asked the class what they had learned, and a little boy piped up, ‘It just goes to prove that you can’t keep a good man down!’

Jonah. He was a real person, the son of Amittal, from a town called Gath Hepher in Zebulun, he was a prophet and ministered from about 800-750BC. Jonah was a contemporary of both Amos and Hosea.

At that time, Israel was the name for the Northern Kingdom, as separate from Judah in the south, and had been through a period of outside rule and territorial struggles. But God had restored its borders and Israel once again relished being God’s special people. Sadly though, they quickly became complacent and conceited in this presumed status and their worship became ritualised and self-focussed.

The book of Jonah is a mere 51 verses long in 4 chapters. Whether you believe the story of Jonah and the big fish is pictorial or an account of actual events is up to you. But the Lord has included it in our Bible and it's a book telling us right through, of God's mercy , compassion and loving grace:

to sailors changing from serving worthless gods in floundering idolatry to meeting with the living God;

to Jonah, through all his many attitudes and challenges;

and to the Ninevites in dramatic style. Let's see what we can learn from it.

**(If no kids, read Jonah 1: 1-16 here)**

Jonah 1: 1-2 says, '*The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amitai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."*' Jonah knew this was a call from the Lord, no question about it. And, being a prophet of the Lord, you might expect Jonah to be full of faith and courage and go forth and do as his Lord God commanded. But sadly, no. In chapter 1 Jonah lives up to his name which means 'Dove' – timid, fearful, senseless!!

Jonah 1: 3 we read, '*But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.*' Jonah goes the opposite way, and some! Ninevah was about 500 miles east of Jonah's home town; Tarshish (probably on the coast of Spain) was 1600 ish miles west! They were effectively at opposite ends of the whole known world at that time.

Why was Jonah so determined not to go to Ninevah? Ninevah was a major city of the hated Assyrian empire. It had a population of at least 120,000 people, and it had a reputation for horrific violence and cruelty that is apparently hard to fathom even today; It was rife with prostitution, witchcraft, and exploitation, totally against anything godly, the Sodom and Gomorrah and worse of its time.

Jonah was a prophet of Israel, not a preacher to the degenerate Assyrians. Jonah was comfy preaching to the Israelites – God's people, even if their worship had dried up, their faith insular and stale, trusting in religious practice and ritual rather than the living God, keeping His light strictly to themselves.

So Jonah fled from God, yet the Psalmist says in 139: 7-10 says, '*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? .... If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast.*' And it's a good job for Jonah that God was and is true to His word!!

We cannot hide from God either. What happens when we go our own way, effectively running against God's direction in our lives? Things get difficult. Who did the sailors turn to? To their own gods. That's what the world does isn't it? People searching for direction, turning not to THE God (capital G) but to their gods (small g), like self-help books, the lottery, retail therapy, substances, likes on social media, horoscopes, etc. Who do you turn to when life gets rough?

When trouble comes, people want someone to blame, as the sailors did. and it seems the first option is always to blame God for it all.

V 9-12 Jonah acknowledged his responsibility for this calamity in turning against God, '*I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the*

*sea and the dry land ..... I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.*”. But our God is forever merciful, and once Jonah was in the water, the storm calmed and the sailors were saved.

So Jonah found himself in the water, probably thinking his life was over, very much in need of God’s mercy to him too.

- **Hymn – ‘Here is love vast as the ocean’**

Our God is indeed merciful, Jonah didn’t drown after all.

### **Read Jonah 1: 17-2:1-7 – Reader**

#### **Talk 2**

V 1. *‘In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me.’* God hasn’t changed, He still holds us up, keeps us from drowning, answers when we call. But how often do we, when we find ourselves in a tricky, difficult, painful situation struggle and fret and only call on the Lord as a last resort. It’s a very good job Jonah didn’t wait that long, else he would have drowned. Instead he called to God IN his distress, not after he’d tried everything on his own, swimming for all he was worth. And from that smelly, slimy, place of big-fishy darkness he remembered the Lord (V 7, *‘When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord.’*).

V 4. He knew his situation was of his own making, but now he had time to get his thinking straight and humble himself before God in repentance and submission, he remembered how faithful and trustworthy God really is, and so his hope was renewed.

Sometimes life seems so very hard and overwhelming in a variety of ways, just as Jonah felt in these verses 5-6, *‘The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me;’* But when we do as Jonah did and humble ourselves before God in repentance and submission, V 6b is as true today for us as it was for Jonah back then, *‘But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.’*

### **Read Jonah 2:8-3: 3a (me)**

So having humbly re-committed himself to the Lord, Jonah survived and (probably after a good wash!) set off for Ninevah, to do what God had asked him to do in the first place. And now we hear how the people of Ninevah responded.

### **Reading – Jonah 3: 3b-10 - Reader**

#### **Talk 3**

Our God is always working and unbeknown to Jonah, God in His great love for those nasty people of Ninevah, had been slowly, gently softening every heart in that great city, so that when Jonah preached his very short sermon from the Lord to them (v 4, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”), this is what happened, ‘The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth ....By decree of the King .... Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence .... When God saw what

they did and how they turned from ... evil, He relented.' This was the greatest revival the world has ever seen so of course Jonah was ecstatic, leaping and praising God and His awesome love for such awful, undeserving people as these Assyrian Ninevites?

No, not a bit of it, Jonah was fuming!! In chapter 4 we read Jonah prayed, '*O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That's why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity!*' And he went off in a majorly deep sulk and plonked himself down away from the city in a miserable, angry heap.

Jonah had been quick to accept God's forgiveness for himself but was totally compassionless towards these hated Assyrians, his sense of justice poles apart from the heart of His God for these people. As we read on in Chapter 4 we read that God tried again to show Jonah God's heart. God made a leafy plant grow up over Jonah to shade him from the sun. Jonah was happy. The next night, God made the plant wither, Jonah was Mr Angry with God again because his sun-shade plant was gone. The last verses of the book of Jonah are God's punch lines of the book, once again showing us the unfathomable depths of His mercy, compassion and deep desire for all people. V 10-11 says this, '*But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"*'

As well as mercy and, compassion, forgiveness too is at the heart of the gospel, and of God Himself; there is no-one outside the reach of God's compassion, mercy and forgiveness, not the Ninevites then, or any modern day equivalent.

- **Hymn – 'How deep the Father's love for us'**

## **POI**

### **Conclusion**

In Isaiah 43 we read, '*This is what the Lord says – He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters ....Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.*'

Jonah had been closed to the 'new thing' the Lord was doing in Ninevah, the great revival and salvation the Lord desired for them.

Sometimes we might look around our world and find some pieces of news that make our hearts heavy and downcast as we see similarities with that city of Ninevah and its godless ways. I'd like to share some encouragements with you for our times in our land.

Firstly, the Bible Society mailing just this week said this, 'At certain moments in history, God moves in a special way – and honestly, this feels like one of them..... Revival is stirring in our own nation – and our report,' The quiet Revival', continues to make headlines in The Times and other newspapers.'

Secondly, Jeff Vines, a pastor and preacher from the US was speaking about this on UCB this past week. He, and a growing number of prominent Christian preachers and speakers, have sensed that the Covid pandemic has changed the spiritual landscape quite markedly. The pandemic provided a time for reflection, a time to reassess commitment (or not) to the Lord and His church, a time to separate the wheat from the chaff maybe. Many have found other things to do on a Sunday morning, other gods to base their lives upon, much like the sailors on Jonah's boat were doing. Sadly, like those sailors did, they may well find their new gods 'worthless idols'. But, there seems to be a growing sense among many godly, prayerful people that God is on the move in a big way, His Spirit bringing to consciousness a growing dissatisfaction with this post-Covid world order, and an evolving spiritual hunger for the truth, for meaning, purpose and for God. This is what God did in Ninevah, this is what He did in the Welsh revival some many decades ago, this is what He is doing now in the people of this and other lost nations.

Unlike Jonah, are we open and seeking to see where God may be working in us, in the life of this church, in the lives of the people around us, or are we as Jonah was, comfy in our faith?

God really wanted Jonah to be part of the wonderful things the He had for Ninevah. If we are to be part of this growing 'quiet revival' in our land, as I am sure the Lord wants us to, we too may need to be eased out of our spiritual comfort zone, to deepen our relationship with the Lord – not in such a dramatic way as for Jonah necessarily – but internally, spiritually, in how we approach people, situations, fait, life, in our attitudes, and what we rely on – our 'gods' if you will. As we offer more of ourselves to the Lord in deeper trust, humility and hope as Jonah did in the belly of the fish, we actually find ourselves more free, more 'comfortable' not less, because our Spirit is becoming more aligned with our Lord Jesus and His love for all people.

Our nation is a rebellious nation towards our God, but just as He had such compassion and merciful love for the people of Ninevah, so He abounds with love for this nation and its people. His desire is that all be saved, and He is the God of all hope, for each one of us, for our families, our church and our nation. Amen.

- **Hymn – 'In Christ alone'**

### **Blessing**

A blessing from Uganda:

Holy Spirit give us faith; Holy Spirit give us hope; Holy Spirit give us love;  
Revive Your work in this land, and let it begin with me.

In the grace, compassion and forgiveness of Christ,  
With the Word and witness of the Holy Spirit we go from this place,  
To love and serve our wonderful God. Amen.