

Southside Worship Online

1 November – Preaching Series: Jonah, Rev. Esteban Liévano



Please click on the link for livesream.com or SSUC [YouTube Channel](#) to access our worship service.

Families with children are encouraged to use family faith materials Ps Richard Moors has made available.

Gathering with God

Lord God,
 You call your people to serve;
 From the comforts of our homes,
 From the welcome of our communities,
 From the pews and routines we've all loved for so long.
 We like Jonah are being called into new and unknown spaces.
 Spaces where perhaps we might things we are uncomfortable with,
 Things that challenge us, things that excite us.
 We may find that we are willing but unable to go,
 That we hope and pray for Your mission, but cannot see beyond the troubles of this world,
 That we are tired and overdrawn and limited...
 But, Lord God, You call us still,
 And from our homes we pray for Your mission field!
 From our safe spaces, we pray for those who are embracing this challenge,
 We hear Your call on our church, "...go to Nineveh."
 So lead us, Jesus Christ – guide us to the mission field –
 At our doorstep, among our friends, in our families,
 And pray as your people, gathered although distant from one another,
 Standing together, though miles apart,
 Worshiping as one, whether at our centres or online or at home.
 Guide Your people, Jesus Christ
 Amen.

Prayer of Approach & Confession

(Adapted from Ex. 15:11 & 13)

Who is like you, Lord God?
 Among those who aspire for vain things,
 Among those who seek material wealth and security,
 Among those who clamour for justice but act unjustly to others?
 These are the gods of this age – but Lord, You are not like these,
 Who is like You, Lord God?
 Your majesty is found in holiness,
 Your awesomeness in imperceptible glory,
 The evidence of Your Love, in the wonders before us.
 In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed.

The people who turn from their ways and seek Your ways,
 The people who aspire to be disciples of Jesus Christ,
 The people led by Your Spirit, towards reconciliation unto You.
 In the Love of God, we experience the reality of Christ the Son,
 Whose life was forfeit so we may find redemption,
 So we know – through Christ our sins are forgiven!

Thanks be to God!

Amen

Scripture Reading – Jonah 1

The Calling of Jonah

¹ The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” ³ 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. ⁴ Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.” ⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” ⁹ He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven,

who made the sea and the dry land.”

¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.) ¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” ¹² “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.” ¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the Lord, “Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man’s life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased.”

¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. ¹⁷ Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

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Offering

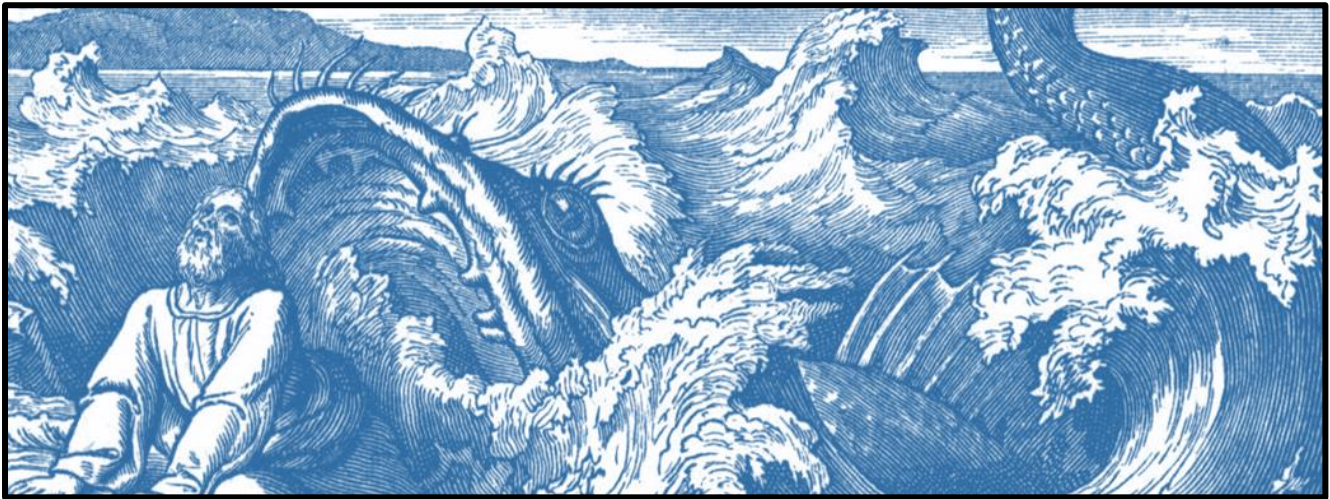
Take a moment to set aside your offering to God’s mission and pray a prayer of blessing over it.

Affirmation / Blessing

We who are one,
 Go forth as a community of care into the many communities in which we live and serve.
 We who are one, go forth in our diverse ways expressing the one love of Jesus the Christ.
 We who are one, go forth into the many paths down which Christ beckons us,
 with the confidence that Christ our companion will lead us safely to the promised goal.
 For we are one, one body in Christ, in faith carrying out our part of God's mission,
 and offering praise to the One God who embraces us all.

Adapted from Pilgrim Uniting’s Worship Resources © Tracy Spencer

Sermon notes



The Reluctant Missionary

Jonah 1

As many of you may already be aware, before joining the Uniting Church, I was training to go out on mission with Wycliffe Bible Translators. I had been training at the picturesque campus at Kangaroo Ground in Victoria. It was there where I had met Kemeru and it was at the Presbyterian Chapel down the road where we got married. It was there where I began leading my first ever bible study and began to ask questions about my calling to mission or ministry. But one thing I knew for certain, “Lord, please don’t take me to Papua New Guinea...”

It wasn’t that I had anything I didn’t like about PNG, or that I had a set destination in mind – it was that everyday at Wycliffe we heard about people who had worked in PNG, were working in PNG or were about to go and work in PNG. We heard extensively about Ukarumpa, in the Eastern Highlands; the Wycliffe Mission Base for PNG – we heard about the programs being carried out from there, the missionary primary school, the airstrip (!)... This mission base is so well known, it even has its own Wikipedia entry ([link](#)). So much discourse was centered on the work going on there, but I thought, “...surely there is some where else?”

Upon our conclusion and graduation from the training course, Kemeru and I were invited to the principals for our interview with the Missions Coordinator. This was a very pleasant meeting with talk about our wedding and the way in which it brought the campus community together – then we got on to our possible placement. The Mission Coordinator had only one recommendation for us, and you guessed it – Ukarumpa in PNG. I was gob smacked, apparently we were the right kind of couple to go and work in the mission school with the missionary children and teens.

While this presented us with an interesting opportunity, it also challenged us greatly – we had been training for a year in translation and theological reflection in order to work with different languages to help them access the Scriptures. This opportunity seemed to be quite distant from what we had in mind – additionally we would still have to raise our own financial support for flights and accommodation while there, so we wouldn’t be able to take up this post for nearly another year.

We left the conversation with much to think about – that very night we spoke with my family in Brisbane and organized to fly home for Christmas. It was during this trip that I heard about another opportunity, one where we would be working with a different language group, where we would be engaging with people in biblical reflection... but it wasn’t in far off lands, it was a church plant right here in Brisbane with the Uniting Church.

Friends, the story of Noah speaks of a Reluctant Missionary, a man who was challenged by God to go and do something he did not feel prepared to do. Similarly, in my story, I was not prepared to go and do this work that seemed out of step with my previous training and experience. Little did I know that God had placed me on a road that through this training I would gain unique and informed perspectives that I employ to serve our church

to this very day. Perhaps, if that meeting in the principals had gone a different way, we may have taken a very different path – but it didn't, rather presenting us with the opportunity we hoped for, it challenged us to seek and follow God's guidance into the space He had prepared with us knowing.

I wonder how often this is true for God's church, or even for us today? We have discussed at our Ministry Team meetings how we could not have foreseen the pandemic and its impact on our church today, yet we know that one of the reasons we have flourished during this season was because we chose to stand together and become SSUC. How many other obstacles are there in our future that we will overcome because we followed God's guidance and challenge, without necessarily understanding the outcomes?

In our reading from Jonah 1, we see that Jonah was reluctant in going to Nineveh, but in the crisis point where all the sailors were panicking, Jonah knew what to do. His action of self-sacrifice, of believe that God would look after him regardless of what he had done, became a great testimony for the sailors. These men worship God as a result of the unintentional witness Jonah provided. Although he had run away from what God had intended for him – he had still been a missionary to these sailors on the boat.

In many ways, the Christian church today is like Jonah – we see God's mission field before our eyes, but we turn away from it. We see homelessness at our doorstep, refugees in our communities, people struggling with social isolation and poverty but we feel disempowered to do something about this. We think it is easier to give to international aid, to send young people overseas but we forget that there are missionaries in our nursing homes and in the schools, in the work places and in the community, engaging with everyday people who need Christ and perhaps we just can't see it.

We are in the midst of a crisis right now, and I don't mean the pandemic – there is a crisis in this country as we see many people suffering and struggling and organizations are disempowered or lack the capacity to respond. I want for our story to be the reverse of Jonah's – instead of running away and being swallowed by a fish, let us start where this chapter finishes. Jonah prayed.

What can we pray for?

- We can pray for God's guidance, what is our Nineveh and how do we get there?
- We can pray for equipping, how will we do what we need to do when were are there?
- We can pray for each other, how can my sister/brother be encouraged in the mission field at our doorstep?
- We can pray for healing, as we walk the wider community we will encounter people who are hurt.
- We can pray for strength, strength for our Ministry Areas, for the teams of people who will be on the forefront of this ministry – and especially if ourselves cannot be out in the mission field, we can cover that mission field in prayer!

Lastly, and as an application, can I encourage you to take up a cause and own it in your prayer life. It can be any of our Outreach groups or activities, it can be our Mission Experiment Group and their research and work, it can be the School Chappies serving in our schools in our region, it can be multicultural/intercultural ministry that we are seeing across the life of our church. It can even be a family, or an individual in our church, someone who you may not even know but you feel in your heart you need to bring them forward in prayer – just rain heaven with prayer for these prayer points and remember that Jonah prayed, and we know what happened at the end of the story.

Grace and Peace

Rev. Esteban Liévano