

Southside Worship Online

8 November 2020, David Fender

Please go to ssuc.org.au to access our worship service.

Families with children are encouraged to use family faith materials Ps

Richard Moors has made available.

Gathering with God

'Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.'

Psalms 105:1-4

Song

10000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

We bless and adore you, most wonderful God,
we come to you with loving awe.

Glorious are you, most beauty-full God,
we come to you with loving adoration.

Glorious are you, most love-full God,
we come to you with loving praise.

By your Holy Spirit inspire us beyond our expectations
and enlarge our faith beyond our understanding.

Holy God, we come before you acknowledging that we have acted poorly in times of faith and doubt. We have ignored our neighbours in need and forgotten the cries of the poor and hungry around us. We have cried out in anger to you when we are lacking our desires and claim you have not heard us. Forgive us for our shortcomings. Forgive us for not acting in faithfulness to our neighbours and to you. Turn us back to your ways. In the name of Christ, who went to the cross for us and cried out to you, we pray all things. Amen.

Song

Revelation Song

Bible Reading

Jonah 2:1-10

Sermon

Communion

Please have some bread and juice ready to share with all who are gathered with you



Offering

Lord Jesus Christ, thank you that you have plans for us that are for my good and your glory. We give to you today as a response to your goodness to us. We ask that you receive our offerings and continue to supply all our needs. May your peace be in our hearts, your grace be in our words, your love be in our hands and your joy be in our souls. In your mighty name, Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord we come to you with our prayers

For friends, family, those in need near and far

We pray for those who are hurting, that their pain may be relieved.

We pray for those whose relationships are broken, that there may be forgiveness.

We pray for those who are sick, that there may be healing.

We pray for those who are weak, that they may be strengthened.

We pray for wisdom and guidance for the leaders of our country.

We pray for relief from debt, joblessness, and recession

We pray for our business leaders that are able to lead the way out of this recession and provide jobs.

We pray for those whose lives have been turned upside down, with not only losing their jobs, but losing their homes, their means of providing for their families, that they may find their way out of their pits.

We pray that their faith may be strengthened and that they find their hope in you.

We pray for the people of the world, who live in places where the economy is much worse, may their lives be turned around for the better.

We pray for those who are experiencing famine like East Africa, may their hunger and physical needs be resolved.

We pray for those who are living in conflict, may peace be brought about.

We pray for Christians who are being persecuted around the world, that they may know your presence and strength of faith.

Lord we all have our spiritual struggles, our pits we have been in, and storms of life, and yet we recognise that you are evermore faithful to hear us and reach out to us to pull us up and out to higher ground. Lord, hear our cries for ourselves, for others near and far. Pour your courage into us, strengthen our faith, and be present to us.

Amen.

Song

Amazing Grace (My chains are gone)

Affirmation / Blessing

“if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” (Romans 10:9-11)

Jonah 2

Repentance

The word of the lord came to Jonah, go East, go to the city of Nineveh, go and prophesy to them of their pending destruction. And hearing Jonah gets up straight away, and goes West. Not just a little bit west, but as far west as he could possibly go. Jonah goes west to avoid God. Somehow thinking that in Tarshish, modern day Spain, that God won't be able to reach him. But even before he gets to Tarshish God reaches out to grab his attention. First a storm, through which Jonah sleeps. And then the crew of the ship asking "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?" (Jonah 1:8) But none of this grabs Jonah's attention.

He is still running. If he can't get to Tarshish, then he'd rather be dead. So he asks the sailors to throw him overboard. But even in the depths of the sea he can't escape God and "the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." (Jonah 1:17).

Now, finally God has got his attention. "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God." Jonah 2:1. Jonah didn't pray when the word came to go to Nineveh, he didn't pray when the storm arose. He didn't pray when all the sailors were calling out to their own gods. No, at all this points Jonah was stuck in his arrogance. He knew better. He didn't need God.

But finally in the belly of the fish Jonah recognises that he is stuffed. And so In his distress he called to the Lord, "and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry." Jonah 2:2

This is Jonah at the very lowest ebb of his life. He's in distress, in agony. Now finally Jonah cannot see any way that he can get himself out of this. He describes himself as being in the "realm of the dead". Figuratively he sees himself as being in the grave. A place in Hebrew known as Sheol. After all that's where he thinks he's going to be. He just needs to wait to die of thirst, hunger or the digestive juices of the fish.

From the point where Jonah was furthest from God, was miserable and had nothing to contribute himself, helpless, desperate, hurting and afraid, he called to God and God answered.

Are you in the realm of the dead now? When you think of a relationship, your health, the health of another. You may be hurting inside, feeling depressed, anxious, a sense of being out of control do you resonate with Jonah's distress? Many decades ago my grandmother was caught in a broken marriage. One day she opened her bedside table draw and saw her long forgotten bible. She'd had no need of this bible for many years, and her first thought was "you silly woman for falling for that." But in her distress, she sat down and started flipping the pages again. And the wave of God's love overcame her. From the depths of her despair she called on God and he answered. She knew that she had no other place to turn. He didn't save her marriage, but he saved her life. God first needed to grab her attention and needs to grab our attention.

In verses 3, 4, 5, and 6, Jonah recalls what it was like when he'd been thrown overboard. "You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever." Jonah :2 – 6 It's dramatic language. He's lost and terrified, but because of his interaction with God things turn around and the last sentence of verse 6 Jonah says, "But you, O God, brought me up from the pit."

Some of you right now, you feel like your life is spiralling out of control, going downward, and I'm going to remind you. Never to forget the "but, God," moments. "My life was out of control, but God intervened. My marriage was in trouble and we thought it was over, but God changed my heart and healed our marriage. The doctor said there's no chance. You might as well just go prepare for the end, but God has the final say."

Jonah goes on to say in verse 7, “When my life was ebbing away I remembered you, O Lord, and my prayer, it rose to your holy temple.” The very root of our human sin is the thought that we can live without God. We think that we can plan and live and make the best of our lives based on our own arrogant and limited understanding.

If I may put thoughts into Jonah’s head, that aren’t in the text. Jonah had a plan for his life in Tarshish, it was certainly better than being a prophet in Nineveh, but I don’t think, and the text bears this out, that he ever imagined that he’d find himself in the belly of a fish.

We might also think I’ll invest my time at work, building a great career, sure it’ll interfere with my family life and then we can’t understand why our marriage breaks up and our children are strangers. We decide that we will prioritise extra curricular activities for our children at the expense of investing them into the life of a community of faith, and then we wonder why they do not have an owned faith.

We may not forget God, but too often I believe we fail to remember him. To remember and include him in our plans, but more importantly to remember to include ourselves in his plans.

And then Jonah changes his tune. A declares a prophetic truth for himself and for us. “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.” (Jonah 2:8) In other words those who pursue anything as a matter of priority over and above God, turn themselves away from the well being that God brings to his people. What were Jonah’s idols. I’d say that his biggest idol was himself. I’ve said it before, but Jonah’s arrogance and thought only of what he wants was a great love in his life than that of God’s.

Secondly, I also think that there was an idol of prejudice. In chapter 4 we read of a conversation with Jonah and God where Jonah still would rather die than see the Ninevites spared the wrath of God. And in chapter 1:10 he’d told the sailors that he was running from God.

What about you? What would your idol be? An idol is anything that we pursue with more vigour and attention than we do God. It doesn’t have to be a bad thing, it can be something inherently worthwhile. But when it stands between us and God, it becomes destructive to our souls. ‘Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.’ 1 John 2:15 Like Jonah it could be our selves. I want to live my life on my terms. It could be our need to control. It could be money, possessions, the attainment of something that this world values. As we come together as one congregation, the maintenance of the identities of our previous congregations could be an idol if they prevent us developing something new. The holding onto methods of mission, that in the past were good, but are no longer applicable in the 21st century, could be an idol.

Jonah had to let go. And then as we read the closing verse, we see the real truth that everyone of us need to hear. Jonah was in the fish, and there was nothing that he could do to contribute to his salvation. He couldn’t go and sacrifice an innocent animal and make a sacrifice to God. He couldn’t give money at the temple. He couldn’t go and do good works. He couldn’t help feed the poor. He couldn’t do any kind of physical good work to contribute to him getting out of that fish. And so Jonah makes this great declaration, “Salvation comes from the Lord.” Effectively he says, “I couldn’t contribute anything.” That’s where salvation comes from. It’s from God. It’s not from you. It’s not from your works. It’s not from doing good things or not doing bad things.

Hundreds of years after Jonah sits in that fish, the apostle Paul writes to a church elsewhere in the Mediterranean ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God’ Ephesians 2:8 And when Jonah makes this marvellous declaration, we are told that the fish vomits him back onto the beach. Jonah has vowed to do what he would do, probably go to Nineveh, and now he finds new life. Where can God lift you out of the pit of death and offer you new life? Amen.