

Southside Worship Online

22 November 2020, Rev. Esteban Liévano

Please go to <https://livestream.com/ggservices/ssuc> 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,
 We are Your people called in different spaces,
 Some of us gather in our churches,
 Others, in our homes,
 But we are all called together, One Congregation gathered in different places.
 Your people remember today that You sent Jonah to preach repentance,
 To call upon a new people to come to you in dust and sackcloth,
 That you forgave them their sin and you spared them from destruction.
 Like Jonah, we are called to preach Your Gospel,
 In our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools,
 Among friends and family,
 So speak to us this day and help us understand what this means for us,
 Your people
 Amen.

Prayer of Approach & Confession

Lord God,
 We call on You on behalf of those who are unwell
 Father, grant them healing,
 We call on You on behalf of those who mourn
 Father, grant them consolation
 We call on You on behalf of those who are isolated
 Father, grant them Your Presence
 We call on You on behalf of this world
 Lord, grant us respite and recovery
 We acknowledge that like the Ninevites who did not know You
 We also have sinned against,
 Though we know You, there are times we done things that did not please You,
 There are times where we have neglected our call as Your people,
 But we know that Your Love is abundant
 That You forgive Your People who would call on Your name (2 Chron. 7:14)
 That You, Lord God, would restore the land where Your people dwell
 So Father, restore us this day, we ask in Jesus' Name
 Amen

Scripture Reading – 1 Chronicles 29:10-19

Jonah's Anger at the Lord's Compassion

¹ But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing 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.

³ Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

⁵ Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.

⁶ Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.

⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.

⁸ When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said.

"And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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?"

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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 – Eph 3:16-19

Lord God,

We pray that we would not make for ourselves temporary shelters,
That we would not be distracted by our own comfort and happiness,
But that we would be challenged by the plight of the world around us.

That we would seek Your Will and Your Desire for this world,

Father, we pray that we as a community may meet You in different ways,

In the faces of those we meet, in the songs we hear, in the connection with the wider community.

Lead us Lord God, pray for our city, to be missionaries in our neighbourhood,

To care for the other and to live out the Love that You have imbued into our lives.

May we be Your disciples, praying for and bringing the message of God's Peace everywhere we go

Through Christ our Lord, we pray

Amen.



Sermon notes

Jonah's Plant

Jonah 4

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

Jonah 4:9

This is the crucial verse from Jonah 4, God had already forgiven the people of Nineveh but Jonah was mourning the death of his plant. This is a very challenging verse for me, because one of the great narratives we hear in all of the Christian churches in Australia is about our diminishing numbers. I have even said it myself at times, I lament the fact that we no longer have Sunday Schools overflowing with kids, that our church camps are now more like once every five years than annual and that we don't have the same outreach and acceptance in society we once enjoyed. But are we guilty of lamenting the plant, when we should be lamenting the world?

This is the great challenge of Jonah, contextually for the first readers of this short book – God was challenging them to share the goodness of God with other Gentile nations. The key verse in this is verse 2 where Jonah calls God out on his character:

*I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God,
slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.*

Jonah knew that if the people repented, God would be compassionate – he also knew that it is in God's nature to forgive. The Jews who would have read these writings would have found this very confrontational. *Elohim* the God of the Old Testament, of Moses and Jacob and Isaac – had been exclusively the God of Israel... and I'm not sure they were ready to share Him. They had gone so far from God's forgiving nature that they had forgotten that God had placed Israel to be a blessing to all nations:

*People of Judah and Israel! In the past foreigners have cursed one another by saying,
'May the same disasters fall on you that fell on Judah and Israel!'
But I will save you, and then those foreigners will say to one another,
'May you receive the same blessings that came to Judah and Israel!' So have courage and don't be afraid."*

Zachariah 8:13 [GNT]

God wanted Israel to be an example to the world, and to be the world's guiding light. We see this in Jonah – Jonah leads the gentile sailors to understand God as God of Sea and Dry Land (Jonah 1:8-16) and then when his message is heard by the king and nobles of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6-10) they repented and spared destruction. Yet when we find Jonah in this chapter, Jonah is angry!

Jonah is angry because God had not come through with the punishment that Jonah had been expecting. He was hoping to see destruction of biblical proportions – instead he witnesses that redemption is what took place instead. The people of Nineveh, who were God’s children just like Israel, were afforded the opportunity to repent and be forgiven. But this made Jonah mad, because this forgiveness belonged to only God’s own people.

I ask the question therefore, are we like this too? Does the Christian church want to see destruction over blessing for the world and the community around us? I don’t think so... but sometimes I wonder if we act like this? Sometimes I wonder if we are not ready to share the blessings we’ve got with those who are right on our doorstep. And I wonder if perhaps, what we are seeing in the church today is our own version of the worm who gobbled up Jonah’s plant?

What if our dropping numbers, our loss of influence in wider society and our diminishing returns on our outreach efforts are like a catalyst to activate us? That the Christian church can see this and realise that while we comfortably sat under our plant – the world around us was crying out for God and we missed it.

Now I should clarify, I am speaking about the Christian church in general here, not our congregation - I am very proud of Southside and our congregation because I believe this is part of what has led us to come together – the knowledge that if we stand together in mission we can amplify our reach and open new avenues for outreach and community like never before. My prayer is that through this series we can be encouraged in the boldness and courage we have exercised in coming together for this worthwhile endeavour. But also be further challenged to recognize those around us who are calling out to God for forgiveness and be prepared to sit with them in the dust to see God’s Will being done in their lives.

So, you may be asking “what can we do about this”, as usual I want to encourage you to pray. If we can pray everyday for God to lead us to people in the community who are calling out to God, I am sure He will answer that prayer and lead us to those people to share His love and to invite them into our community of faith.

Another thing we can pray for is those of us who are on the front-line mission of our church, Rev. Jock the Mission Experiment Group, Ps. Richard and the various children’s and youth activities and participants, and the teams of people who support those programmes as well as the outreach programmes. But also, those who are doing mission without recognition – the people who live out Christ in the work places and in their hobbies, at school or uni and at the various community based activities we are all a part of. May God direct them to sharing His love in profound ways and thus encourage others to seek Him out in Christian fellowship.

Lastly, we can change our own mindset – we can also seek out those who call upon the Lord right now! We can be prepared to have those faith-based conversations with others and hopefully share with them a little bit of God’s love that we so enjoy! If you are challenged by this and you would like to learn more about having faith based conversations or even where to begin... please contact our ministry team so we may pray with you and find if there is a space in which you might be able to bless others by sharing that Love of God in your life.

Grace and Peace
Rev. Esteban Liévano