

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

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Sunday Scriptures: 24th January 2021

Jonah 3:1-10 *God said, “get up and go!”*

The Word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, ²“Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” ³So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the Word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three day’s walk across. ⁴Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, ‘Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ ⁵And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. ⁶When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. ⁸Human beings and animals shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from any violence that is in their hands. ⁹Who knows? God may relent and change His mind; He may turn from His fierce anger, so that we do not perish.’ ¹⁰When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed His mind about the calamity that He said He would bring upon them; and He did not do it.

Reflection:

Have you ever been asked to do something that you did not want to do? Knowing what is right by God does not necessarily make it any easier to carry out. Society teaches us from birth that anything different is subject to rejection and any challenge is liable to bring reprisals. Societal responses form our character according to self-preservation and tend to squash the actions of faith. Such was the dilemma of nature versus faith for Jonah and his ensuing struggle of conscience over what God was asking him to do. God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh and cry out against their wickedness. Jonah was to be God’s catalyst for repentance, as was John the Baptist and all other prophets before and since. Jonah was torn between human and spiritual emotions. His human inclination was to spew out condemnation as the whale had spewed him out onto the beach. Jonah knew the people of Nineveh had abandoned God’s instructions for righteous living in favour of personal desires and he would see them punished for it. However, his spiritual knowledge of God knew that He was; ‘gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing’ (4:2). Jonah’s dilemma was twofold: would he suffer reprisals for speaking the Truth of condemnation that God had told him to do; or would the people repent, turn back to God and be forgiven and blessed? Neither of these outcomes appealed to Jonah; instead of confronting his own prejudices and personal desires, he ran away.

There are two basic human instincts when faced with danger or threat of losing something: fight or flight. Faith requires that we reject both in favour of ‘standing’, which means not behaving as aggressors or as doormats. God has given us the principles of living in a right relationship with Him and each other through His Word and the teaching of Jesus. We are called not to ‘fight’ or ‘flight’ but to ‘stand in faith’ against those behaving against the Word of God and in support of those suffering injustices because of wrongdoing. “Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of Truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness.” (Ephesians 6:14). Judgement, is for God and God alone. Jonah had to first

repent of his own natural inclinations before God could release him from his self-imposed prison. Having repented and received his forgiveness, Jonah delivered the Truth of Nineveh's wickedness, just as God had commanded, without fear or favour. Following our human inclinations against the Word of God will place us in a self-imposed prison, just as Jonah did. We must not be surprised then if God chooses to discipline us in one way or another to bring us to repentance. God does this for our own sake but also for the wellbeing of those around us suffering the consequences of our selfish behaviour. Because of Jonah's personal repentance followed by his obedience, a whole nation was saved and brought back into a right relationship with God and each other. And all God's people say, 'Amen!'

The Truth often hurts but also often facilitates change for good. Sometimes we need a short sharp shock to wake us up to the Truth of our behaviour and resultant circumstances. Are there prejudices and personal desires within us that need confronting? Are we wrestling with dilemmas of conscience in our own self-imposed prison? Will we repent of our own wrongdoing and return to God in righteousness? God says that any nation on which He pronounced judgement would be saved if they repented ([Jeremiah 18:7-10](#)). The purpose of God's judgement is correction, not revenge. God forgave Nineveh just as He had forgiven Jonah and responded in mercy by cancelling His proposed punishment. Jonah recognised that "Those who worship vain idols forsake their True loyalty" ([2:8](#)). The people of Nineveh only needed to hear God's message once and they 'believed God!' Their response was acclaimed by Jesus, who said that at the judgement day, these Ninevites will rise up to condemn the Israelites for their failure to repent ([Matthew 12:39-41](#)). God is always ready to show compassion to anyone willing to repent and turn back to Him. The king of Nineveh declared a fast of repentance for all the people and their livestock, en masse! What a miraculous effect God's Word of Truth has! When was the last time we were called, as Christ's Church, to pray and fast in repentance? During the last world war the King called for a national day of prayer; during our current situation a Christian request to the government for such a call was rejected! God's message to the Ninevites is as relevant for us today as it was then and is for everyone. God requires a response to His Word; to accept or reject and He acts accordingly. If we proclaim God's message of Truth, without fear or favour, we may be surprised at how many people will listen and respond in obedience to restore a right relationship with our Lord and each other.

Following our own desires is like playing Russian Roulette; there is no way of knowing if the next squeeze of the trigger will bring death! Obedience to God's Word and following the example of Jesus secures the safety of our souls and of those around us. Will we choose to repent, turn back to God and receive forgiveness, or, take a gamble and sacrifice our soul! Jonah had forgotten that God loves everyone and He desires that all people be saved, no matter how far away their current behaviour has taken them. If Jonah had not delivered God's message of Truth, he would have denied their opportunity to hear, repent, turn to God and receive forgiveness. Instead of a whole nation saved, a whole nation would have been destroyed! Jesus makes it clear that Truth is the first step to salvation: [John 8:31-32](#) ³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him, "If you continue in My Word, you are truly My disciples; ³²And you will know the Truth, and the Truth will make you free." [John 17:17](#) Sanctify them in Truth; Your Word is Truth. Jonah tried to avoid Truth and run away from God only to discover the dire consequences of ignoring the conviction of God's Holy Spirit.

When we do something wrong we know it! We may not want to admit it but we surely know it! It is futile to deny wrongdoing or try to justify ourselves and persuade others to support our actions, because God is watching and He knows the Truth! Our disobedience hurts the

whole family of God not just ourselves. Repentance is a choice and through it we are set free from our own desires, the influence of society, politics, money, and false testimony. We are then blessed with discernment as God's instruments in a world greatly in need of Truth, justice and righteousness, resulting in much needed healing. When the people of Nineveh heard the Word of God they believed and repented. On seeing their genuine efforts to turn back toward Him, "God changed His mind about the calamity that He said He would bring upon them; and He did not do it." The witness we give affects everyone around us, a chain is only as strong as the weakest link. If we do not practice what we preach we are no more than hypocrites, and who then will respect us? If we do not demonstrate what we believe who will listen? The ultimatum has been given; we are seeing the established denominations of our time declining fast! God is challenging the Body of Christ to put God's house in order and time is running out. If the church does not respond in repentance, then we will soon be no more. But if we respond with obedience, then a whole nation will be saved. Amen!

Hymn/Song: In These Days of Darkness (Carry the Fire) by Sue Rinaldi & Steve Bassett
Can be found in SoF 819

In these days of darkness,
Who will bear the Light?
In all of this confusion,
Who will rise against the night?
And who will light a beacon
In the face of this dark, dark sky?
With a hope that is eternal,
With a love that will never die?

Chorus:...

Oh, I, I will carry the fire.

Oh I, I will carry the fire.

I will not rest, I will not tire,

With all my strength I'll carry the fire.

I will not rest, I will not tire,

With all my strength I'll carry the fire.

Where there is oppression,
Who will raise the flame?
For the sake of all the children,
Who will touch the fields of shame?
And who will light a beacon
In the face of this dark, dark sky?
With a hope that is eternal,
With a love that will never die?

Chorus:...

Who will burn with passion,
Blazing from the heart,
To forge a new tomorrow?
We must tell the world
Of a hope that is eternal,
Of a love that will never die.
And we will light a beacon
In the face of this dark, dark sky.

Chorus:...

Poem: TRUTH ©Janice Morgan-1998

Truth speaks inwardly without noise of words
and shines through the eyes of the soul

One who speaks Truth is listened to carefully
but the words of a fool are dismissed unheard

Truth is the rock on which we stand secure
but depart and the soul will surely be destroyed

Though mischief be made in the secret of darkness
the Truth is exposed with the passing of time

Truth releases the river of forgiveness
who's overwhelming wave is the secret of peace

The eyes are the windows of the soul
therein can be seen the Truth of the heart

God is watching and God knows the Truth!

Prayer: Father God, forgive our human weakness; Jesus Christ, reveal to us the Truth; Holy Spirit, teach us the way of repentance; Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless us with a fresh vision of Your will. **Amen!**
