



Stewardship Season

Talents

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Gillean MacLean, minister of Udney and Pitmedden, for her thoughts on the stewardship of talents.

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The Book of Jonah

The story of Jonah is a rich resource that can be adapted for any and every generation. Despite the fact that many theologians have dismissed the story as just that, it is a wonderful story for youngsters of all and every age! It is at once exciting, amusing and alarming.

The authorship of the book is unclear but there seems to be no reason not to believe that it was written by the prophet himself.

Jonah was said to have lived in the Galilean city of Gath-hepher (about four miles north of Nazareth) during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.), King of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 14:25). Jeroboam II was northern Israel's most powerful king, and during his administration the borders of the nation were greatly extended.

Assyria, however, five hundred miles to the east, was a constant threat and the prophets Hosea and Amos, contemporaries of Jonah, had declared that God would use the might of Assyria to punish his people (cf. Hosea 11:5; Amos 5:27).

Given that situation it isn't hard to imagine how Jonah must have felt when he got the word from God that he had to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, with a rather unpalatable message!

The story describes a drama between God and Jonah (the name means literally 'dove'). From the outset Jonah lives up to his name. He has no intentions of taking an unhappy message to the people of Nineveh. Many of the prophets had heroic names (e.g. Isaiah meaning 'God has saved'), and so Jonah's name tells us a little about the kind of man he was. When Jonah runs away, God pursues him relentlessly. When Jonah falls, God lifts him up. In the first part of the book, God is depicted as relentless and wrathful; in the second part of the book, He is revealed to be truly loving and merciful.

The other characters of the story include the sailors in chapter 1 and the people of Nineveh in chapter 3. These characters are also contrasted to Jonah's inability to get to grips with his calling. While Jonah sleeps in the hull, the sailors pray and try to save the ship from the storm (1:4-6). While Jonah is eventually forced to submit to God's will, the people of Nineveh on the other hand actively petition God to change his mind and Jonah is not pleased!



1 Corinthians 12: 1-31

I like the translation of this passage that can be found in *The Message* (Eugene Peterson).

This chapter in Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth is part of a longer section on "spiritual gifts" (charismata) that can be divided into several sections. (ch12.v.1 -14.v40) The first emphasises the source of the gifts, the Holy Spirit, then the purpose of the gifts, followed by a piece on how the gifts should be viewed by the members of the church.

The letter implies that in the past, in their pagan worship, the members of the church simply followed the crowd unaware of why they were doing what they were doing. Paul goes on to describe the variety of the gifts by comparing them to parts of the body and indicates how each gift is designed to complement the others. In this way the community of the Church is served as a whole.

God is the source of the gifts and God decides which gift each disciple will be given. No gift is greater than the other and as Peterson translates it (v. 13) "If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance."

Mark 1: 16-20, 10: 35-45

These two portions of Mark's Gospel describe how Jesus recruited his followers. Who were they? They were fishermen and he calls them from their everyday work to follow him. Jesus chose carefully and he chose men who were not learned in any academic sense, nor were they wealthy or powerful. That is not to say that they weren't skilled or intelligent however. The fishing industry of Jesus' time was huge around the Lake of Galilee. Ordinary people in Palestine ate mostly fish and for those that didn't live close to the water it was often salt fish which was processed by the fishermen and shipped off to Jerusalem and other parts of Palestine and even as far as the great city of Rome itself.

The men had probably heard Jesus speak and perhaps had got to know him but he came to them as they were in the midst of their working day and called them to follow him. It was as simple as that! The theologian Willie Barclay likens it to falling in love. They dropped what they were doing and followed their hearts!



When we get to chapter 10, things have changed dramatically. Mark's Gospel is perhaps the most straightforward of the four and the two disciples, James and John do not come out well from this exchange.

The phrase 'warts and all' may come from a painting of Oliver Cromwell that was commissioned from the court painter of the time, Sir Peter Lely. Lely wanted to please Cromwell and so he left out of the painting the many warts that Cromwell had on his face. When Cromwell saw the painting he sent Lely back to paint them in, telling the artist that he wanted to be depicted 'warts and all'. Mark's Gospel wants us to see the disciples for what they were -warts and all!

The disciples question to Jesus shows us just how they have misunderstood all that Jesus had tried to teach them about the kingdom of God. Time and again they have proved that they didn't understand. They have missed the whole point of servanthood. Their ideas about power and their ambitions could easily have caused trouble between the disciples if Jesus had not acted immediately to set them straight and set them straight he did! Jesus describes to them an upside down kingdom that is very different from the world's standards of power and influence, a kingdom in which power and wealth and influence has no sway. Perhaps they still did not understand but they believed in Jesus. They followed him because they loved him and they trusted him. It was a decision based on the person of Jesus and as their Master predicted they did follow him in the end. James was ultimately beheaded by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12 v 2) and although John was probably not martyred he certainly suffered much during his life for Jesus sake.

Sermon ideas

All of the above readings suggest to me that we are wonderfully and marvellously different and God has a job for us all! God calls us from our ordinary lives and equips us through the spirit with the appropriate talents to do extraordinary things. Perhaps this is an excellent opportunity to involve as many people as possible in preparing and delivering the worship on the day as an illustration of the many talents that are already in use in the life of your church.

1. The story of Jonah reminds us that we are not always going to be delighted by our calling nor necessarily willing to allow God to use our talents for the sake of his kingdom. In fact many of us run in the opposite direction to begin with. God will however get us in the end, even to the



extent of fishing us out of the sea if necessary! Our task may not always be to our taste but God will never leave us to deal with it on our own and will identify the talents that we need for the job in hand. Perhaps you could begin with telling the story of your own calling or that of someone you know. There are plenty of historical figures in the Christian tradition that could be used as an illustration.

Some good stories to illustrate your sermon can be found on [Stories for Preaching](#).

2. Using the Corinthians reading you could emphasise the variety of gifts that make up the body of Christ. The congregation might be invited to list the gifts they see in each other and the lists could be displayed somewhere for everyone to read at the end of the service. Alternatively you could have some fun with the different parts of the body, keeping it clean of course!
3. The readings from the Gospel of Mark remind us that we all have feet of clay and that we often get things wrong and misunderstand but Christ will not give up on us no matter what happens. God calls us to a life of service. This text could be used to emphasise the upside down nature of Christ's kingdom as opposed to the ways of the world.

This quote comes from the wonderful poem by T.S.Elliot "Choruses from the Rock" and can be used to illustrate how God creates and discovers community in us, using us all as we work together to build the kingdom of God.

"Let me show you the work of the humble.

Listen.

In the vacant places

We will build with new bricks

Where the bricks are fallen

We will build with new stone

Where the beams are rotten

We will build with new timbers

Where the word is unspoken

We will build with new speech

There is work together



A Church for all
 And a job for each
 Every man to his work.
 What life have you, if you have not life together?
 There is not life that is not in community,
 And no community not lived in praise of GOD.”

Time with Children

The story of Jonah is great fun! There are some fabulous ‘YouTube’ versions that can be shown including a couple of LEGO movies.

The story could be acted out by the youngsters or told using the congregation to provide sound effects. There are lots of resources online to help illustrate the story along with songs and suggestions for crafts and games. However, as the subject is talents then it will be important to make that link as you wind up the children’s time.

OR

Using the ideas from the Corinthians passage and depending on the age range of your young people a discussion about what the children are best at or enjoy most in school or as hobbies at home. How can these things that they do in other places be of value to the church family? An all age service could be constructed using the gifts and talents that the young people have as an illustration to the whole congregation of the ministry of the whole people of God.

OR

Any kind of team game that illustrates the importance of everyone working together.

Prayers

God of love, of life and of each one of us
 let us take time to look deep within ourselves
 that we might discover the wonderful things you have blessed us with.
 Help us to allow your Spirit to direct our lives



in a way that best uses our own unique combination of talents.

May our education help us realise

where our strengths and interests lie.

May our faith guide us in realising our gifts.

May we always be open to the sound of your voice calling us

and never forget the love you have for each of us.

Grant us the wisdom we need to look within ourselves and discover the beauty and gifts we each have.

Give us the courage to show others the talents they have.

Help us serve others in the community and in so doing build up your kingdom.

We ask this through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer (unknown British source)

O Christ the Master Carpenter

who, at the last, through wood and nails,

purchased our whole salvation.

Wield well your tools

in the workshop of your world,

so that we,

who come rough-hewn to your bench,

may here be fashioned

to a truer beauty of your hand.

We ask it for your own name's sake.

Amen

A Wee Worship Book 4th ed. (Wild Goose)

Blessing

Lord set your blessing on us

as we travel this day together.

Confirm in us the truth



by which we rightly live;
confront us with the truth
from which we wrongly turn.
We ask not for what we want
but for what you know we need
as we offer this day and ourselves
for you and to you
through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen.

A Wee Worship Book 4th ed. (Wild Goose)

Opening Response

Gather us O God

And we will know your life that makes us one

Gather us O God

And we will celebrate our variety and uniqueness

Gather us, O God

And we will give you the pain of our brokenness

Gather us, O God

And we will share the gifts of your Spirit.

Trinity of love bind us as one

That our brokenness be healed by you

That our fears be held by you

That our gifts be used by you

That our lives be offered to you

So may the world believe.

Amen

Ali Newell, 'Holy Ground'. Wild Goose Publications



Musical suggestions

God, our gifts we lay before you (Tune Nettleton) found in *Barefeet and Buttercups*. Wild Goose Publications.

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|---------|---------------------------------------|
| SGP 84 | O Lord all the world belongs to you |
| CH4 527 | Lord make us servants of your peace |
| CH4 528 | Make me a channel of your peace |
| CH4 529 | Forth in thy name O Lord, I go |
| CH4 532 | Lord you have come to the seashore |
| CH4 533 | Will you come and follow me |
| CH4 544 | When I needed a neighbour |
| CH4 497 | Almighty Father of all things that be |
| CH4 694 | Brother sister let me serve you |
| CH4 502 | Take my life |



Additional Resources

Pray Now is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers.

Word of Life is available from [St Andrew Press](#).



SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the

Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading

Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)

Quick Guide...



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Gillean MacLean providing us with this material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.



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