

**Sunday 13 September 2020, a service for use at home; Haddington West Church, Garvald and Morham**

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

Ps.103,1.3-4 *"Bless the Lord, my soul. He pardons all my wrongdoing, and crowns me with love and compassion."*

**Collect:** Almighty God, you call your Church to witness that in Christ we are reconciled to you. Help us so to proclaim the good news of your love, that all who hear it may turn to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one god, now and for ever. AMEN

**Sing to the Lord a joyful song**

Sing to the Lord a joyful song,  
lift up your hearts, your voices raise;  
to us His gracious gifts belong,  
to Him our songs of love and praise.

For life and love, for rest and food,  
for daily help and nightly care,  
sing to the Lord, for He is good,  
and praise His name, for it is fair.

For strength to those who on Him wait  
His truth to prove, His will to do,  
praise ye our God, for He is great,  
trust in His name, for it is true.

For joys untold, that from above  
cheer those who love His sweet employ,  
sing to our God, for He is love,  
exalt his name, for it is joy.

Sing to the Lord of Heaven and earth,  
whom angels serve and saints adore,  
the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
to whom be praise for evermore.

*William Smallwood (1831-97)*

**Jonah 1,: 1-10**

**"The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.' 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.**

**Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 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. 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.'**

**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. 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?'**

**He answered, 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.' 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.)**

Dear friends

Both Matthew and Luke tell us in their gospels that Jesus made reference to the book of Jonah in a way which suggested strongly that understanding its message could serve to shed light on his own, and indeed on those who heard him. Lk.11,29ff.: *"As the crowds increased, Jesus said, 'This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. ... The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.'*" We have good reason, then, to expect that by looking at the book of Jonah and letting it deliver its message to us – in the light of Christ, *one greater than Jonah* – we may hear God's word to us.

The book opens with an answer to a most relevant question – that of the God-factor in our history. In Jonah's day it would not have occurred to many to deny there was such a thing even if in accounting for it opinions would vary greatly. Indeed, then as now, the *truth* of it would come to be known only through experience and revelation. Today in some respects the landscape has changed. It would not be wrong to say that the sense prevails quite widely that the relevance of any God-factor to account for the state of things and for finding a better way is small.

This is not so, of course, when we talk about the human factor. We all have a sense of how important the 'human factor' is in the question of what becomes of us and of the world, in the shaping of reality. We recently watched the film that tells the story of the events of the day in the winter of 2007 when an American passenger plane made an emergency landing on the river Hudson and managed to do so without the loss of a single life and without breaking the fuselage. At the end of the hearings of the investigation that followed, somebody sums up the conclusion of their findings by saying that the success of the landing was ultimately down to 1 factor – the human factor that was Captain Sullivan. Yes, we have a healthy sense of the importance of the human factor in the decisions and events that shape our world and our lives. We wouldn't deny that the human factor is relevant. But neither should we deny that the God-factor is.

But what of the human factor and its role in our lives as they are before God? And what of the God-factor? What role does it play in how things turn out? The book of Jonah is like a picture book that lets us see some answers.

It opens with the prophet Jonah being tasked by God to go to Nineveh and make the people, both rulers and ordinary folk, aware of judgement, to tell them their *"wickedness has come up*

*before me*". That is, the God -factor is present in the issue of divine judgment pronounced against wickedness and evil, against human sin. In the picture of Nineveh and the prophetic message of divine judgment we become aware of the God-factor and its significance and bearing upon us – that God searches and makes transparent, for the sake of truth and justice, by what principles and by what rule we (actually) live. He brings it into the open, "into the light of his presence" (Ps.90,8) through the declaration of his word – how we ought to live - and through punishment.

In fact, some of the sharpest rebukes in the Scriptures are directed towards the teachers who conceal from the people this aspect of the God-factor, do not declare to the people their sins nor that God requires righteousness and will not let the guilty go unpunished. Their rebuke ought to open our eyes and hearts anew to this reality of the God-factor – it is no more removed by concealment through vain thinking and idle talk than is the fact that God is "*the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land*" (v.9)

Now in the next picture, however, we see the human factor coming into play in a way which is at odds with God. Jonah does not comply with God's will and sets out in the opposite direction. Why? As we learn later in the book it is because he has a hunch that Nineveh's response to the message of God's judgment might be repentance, might be that they agree and turn to God from the heart and seek to do right. And then what?! Then God would relent and not bring on Nineveh the destruction which his judgment was threatening. And this thought, that God would be gracious to Israel's arch-enemy, to the wicked and utterly undeserving enemy at the hand of whom they suffered so much, was unbearable to Jonah.

Jonah knows that the God-factor means not just judgment but even more so grace in repentance and faith. God's judgment serves the greater end of God's mercy and grace which man receives in repentance and faith.

Dear friends, the true picture of the human factor is that it brings into play disobedience, hardness of heart, rebellion against God's way. But it is also brings into play one whom God does not let go or give up on, whom God speaks to and calls and whom He wants to know His grace and love, to be redeemed and to be righteous and indeed holy. And the true picture of the God-factor is that God works His will through judgment and through grace so as to save and be a Saviour. And there we see the picture truly where we look on the one "*greater than Jonah*", namely Jesus Christ.

AMEN

Teach me Thy way

- 1 Teach me Thy way, O Lord,  
teach me Thy way!  
Thy gracious aid afford,  
teach me Thy way!  
Help me to walk aright,  
more by faith, less by sight;  
lead me with heavenly light:  
teach me Thy way!
- 2 When doubts and fears arise,  
teach me Thy way!  
When storms o'erspread the skies,  
teach me Thy way!  
Shine through the cloud and rain,

through sorrow, toil, and pain;  
make Thou my pathway plain:  
teach me Thy way!

- 3 Long as my life shall last,  
teach me Thy way!  
Where'er my lot be cast,  
teach me Thy way!  
Until the race is run,  
until the journey's done,  
until the crown is won,  
teach me Thy way!

*Benjamin Mansell Ramsey (1849–1923)*

- time of prayer / intercession –

***'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen'***

**The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.**

*And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you.*

**AMEN**