

Sunday 11 October 2020, a service for use at home; Haddington West Church

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

Ps.23: "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

Collect: Almighty God, you have built your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone. Join us together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may become a holy temple, acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. AMEN

1 I come in joy and wonder
to meet my Lord today,
in quiet expectation
to listen and to pray.
I lift my hands towards Him;
my heart leaps up in praise:
for He's the great creator,
the God of endless days.

2 The Lord is just and righteous
in all His words and ways;
His holiness burns brightly,
an all-consuming blaze,
yet through His grace and mercy,
I can draw near to see
for Christ has spread His garment
of righteousness on me.

3 I come to praise my Saviour
who hung on Calvary;
His death and resurrection
have set this sinner free!
But, as I bow before Him,
I do not come alone:
I share with countless millions
who've made His name their own.

4 So Father God, we praise You
for love in Jesus shown,
now by Your Spirit teach us
to make His gospel known:
till, with Your holy people
all gathered at Your feet,
in praise that knows no limits
Your kingdom is complete.

Derek Baldwin

David Peacock

Jonah 3,1-10

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.’ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

‘By decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, hers of flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish’.

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”

Dear friends

“...proclaim to it the message I give you”, Jonah has now become the messenger to fulfil God’s mission to Nineveh. He has become the witness to Nineveh of the sovereign God “*from whom comes salvation.*” He is, by way of being a sign, the message himself, representing Jesus Christ in whom God has judged sin and gives grace – in whom God breaks down humankind’s hostility to His way and makes peace. Jonah, as we remember, manifested this hostility by wanting to sabotage God’s plan and in that way to make sure that reconciliation and love and mercy would not have their way with Assyria, that is, with those undeserving of it. But Jonah was also a prophet and so manifested something that God showed of himself, of the way God responds to this hostility through judgment and grace.

And now everything depends on Jonah going to Nineveh and being the faithful messenger of God’s word, because God means to accomplish his work in this way and by this means in the repentance and faith of those who hear. So says Paul in Rom.10,13 that ‘*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*’ and follows this with an argument designed to show that this happens as a result of the message: “*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’”* (v.14-15)

And so for us, for the church, everything depends on the faithful transmission of God’s word, because it is by this word that God saves. Only that this word is not Jonah’s, but the fuller, greater message of God’s saving purpose which Jonah prefigured – Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, the Lord Himself.

Now Jonah is sent to Nineveh with a word of warning. We remember how the book begins with the words: “*Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up*

before me." (1,2) This is still what he has to preach. Going through this vast and great city he proclaims: *"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown"*, that is, he proclaims to Nineveh that it is facing God's judgment.

Again, this may sound strange to us, especially since the point surely is not lost on us that Nineveh stands for the city and kingdom of man which all unredeemed humanity is a version of, ours too, and to which God sends His word of reconciliation. Indeed, the whole point of God's treatment of Jonah was to make him what he was not – an instrument of grace and reconciliation, of repentance and faith. And here he is preaching judgment, warning of the coming end, careless of those who say 'Why do you preach fear?!' Should he not come with a different message if he is to have Nineveh's ear?

But we had occasion several times in our reading of 'Jonah' to see that reconciliation stands on two feet – judgment and grace. And if we think about it, wisely so, because on two feet a thing does what on one foot it can't and won't – namely, run. Reconciliation goes nowhere standing on one foot only.

There are those who would have judgment only, and indeed, as we shall see, Jonah himself is of this type even after he received grace. Yes, there are those who sound only the note of judgment, not recognising that the point of it is to prepare us for knowing the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit! Among the preachers and witnesses of our mainline churches and church families there are few such – the word of judgment is not in vogue. But there are not at all few of those who when they judge others do *only* that – ungracious, unloving, not intent on reconciliation. ("Serves them right!") Where you have judgment only there you will have hardening and refusal only.

But there is error on the other side too. Grace apart from judgment becomes a thing that is empty of the power to change a person for the better, to change and improve a person's standing with God and with others. Instead it easily ends up being put to use in the bubble of self-care: grace makes me feel better about myself, about life... The love of God is often spoken of here, but it is a love which neither humbles nor crowns, neither brings to death nor makes alive again, it just makes greater what in one's own eyes is already great. Again, there are many who preach and understand grace in this way, but there are few who therefore offer grace to one deemed undeserving, who look out for signs of repentance and faith.

But Jonah was sent to Nineveh with the message of judgment, even as God was poised to be gracious and relent and *"not bring on them the destruction he had threatened."* And so are we; the word of God which is the word of reconciliation, sends its messengers into the streets of the city of man with the warning of judgment: "This in the eye of the Truthful One is the way you are walking in, doing what is evil in His sight, and if you continue in this way your overthrow is sure!", even as the word points to Christ and says: "He was given in judgment for your sins, rejected by the world because he testifies to it that it works are evil (Jn.7,7). Let him show you and teach you how to walk in his way. Turn to him, away from your own way, and let him take the burden of your sins and give you the light of forgiveness and grace."

Dear friends, the Ninevites turned and repented, and that was a thing of hope, as well as of heavenly rejoicing, for God was waiting with open arms, He was waiting with grace. AMEN

1 Oh, the mercy of God, the glory of grace,
that You chose to redeem us, to forgive and restore,
and You call us Your children, chosen in Him
to be holy and blameless to the glory of God.

*To the praise of His glorious grace,
to the praise of His glory and power;
to Him be all glory, honour and praise
for ever and ever and ever, amen.*

2 Oh, the richness of grace, the depths of His love,
in Him is redemption, the forgiveness of sin.
You called us as righteous, predestined in Him
for the praise of His glory, included in Christ.

To the praise . . .

3 Oh, the glory of God expressed in His Son,
His image and likeness revealed to us all;
the plea of the ages completed in Christ,
that we be presented perfected in Him.

To the praise . . .

Words and music by Geoff Bullock

Lord God, help us to learn from our sins to flee to Christ who is our refuge and our deliverance, our hope and our glory. Make good in us the message of your word which leads to repentance and faith so that bowing before you we may stand tall before the world to the praise of your name.

- 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’

“May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of an eternal covenant, make you perfect in all goodness so that you may do his will; and may he create in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever!” Hebr.13, 20-21

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

AMEN