

Sunday 6th March 2022 Evensong
1st Sunday of Lent (C)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Jonah 3
NT: Luke 18.9-14

In preparing for this sermon, reading Jonah and the passage from Luke, one word hit me- motivation. The definition of motivation is a reason or reasons for acting or behaving in a particular way. I felt I needed to explore this further- what was Jonah's motivation for initially fleeing from God and what was the Pharisee's motivation for making a song and dance of his so-called piety in the temple?

Firstly Jonah. I studied the book of Jonah during my ordination training and found it to be a fascinating story, a book with only four chapters. The book of Jonah is split into two distinct parts- chapters 1 to 2 and chapters 3 to 4. The author uses the start of chapter 3, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message I tell you', as an indication that a new episode has started. Within these two episodes there are two defined scenes- in the first, Jonah travelling to Tarshish, the storm at sea and then Jonah praying within the depths of the large fish. In the second episode, Jonah preaches to Nineveh and God forgives Nineveh and in the final scene God talks to Jonah about his anger after God pardons Nineveh.

Why initially did Jonah flee from The Lord? He may have genuinely not wanted to deliver the news to Nineveh, knowing that they would hear it, repent and be saved. This is a challenging thought. Jonah provokes thoughts about what do we expect God to do? Do we want everyone to be given the opportunity to repent and be forgiven by God- or are we like Jonah, reluctant to do his will, because we know where it will lead? Are there people in society who we believe are beyond the bounds of God's abundant, forgiving love? Have

there been times when we have literally fled from what God has been calling us to do?

What was our motivation for running away?

In Luke, the Pharisee is portrayed as someone who trusts in his own righteousness and regarded others with contempt. He thanks God that he is not like the thieves, adulterers and tax collectors and he points out his fasting and tithing. What was the Pharisee's motivation for acting in this way? Arrogance, pride or maybe insecurity. He may have been actually insecure about his own walk with the Lord and wanted to place attention elsewhere, to those he felt were not worthy to receive God's forgiveness. In comparison, the tax collector cries out to the Lord for forgiveness and Jesus notes that he was justified rather than the Pharisee.

Jesus points out the importance of humility and not exalting ourselves. During Lent, this can be a time to examine our motivation. Our motivation to pray, to love more, judge less, be humble and to examine how we can come close to God and not flee from Her.

In Jonah and throughout the Gospels, God is portrayed as a loving and forgiving God, a God with a love that knows no bounds. A love that transcends gender, difference, culture, sexuality, ability- an abundant and extravagant love. A challenge for us as we travel on our Lenten journey is to remain rooted in Jesus despite all of the horror that is taking place in the world right now. As pilgrims on this Lenten journey we can focus on the power of the resurrection that renews and sustains us.

The Revd Jennifer Brady