

## Saved from a Night of Despair!

Sermon for Easter Monday

Sermon Text: Jonah 1:17 - 2:11



*1:17 And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 2saying, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and He answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. 3 For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all Your waves and Your billows passed over me. 4 Then I said, 'I am driven away from Your sight; yet I shall again look upon Your holy temple.' 5 The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head 6 at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet You brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. 7 When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple. 8 Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. 9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" 10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*

Near the city of Kiev, Alina sat in a basement with her brother. They were there in the dark room for 5 days. They constantly heard the scary rushing of the rockets. Then her brother kept telling her to pull her legs really close together and to keep her head between her knees so her limbs wouldn't be ripped off by a bomb. A couple meters above the basement, she and her brother heard how the Russian soldiers bragged about their military successes. Drunk and certain of victory, they brag about the people they had just killed. Alina and her brother were terribly afraid. They knew what would happen if they were discovered. And yet they stayed there for 5 days and 5 nights and in the background, they can hear the noise of bombs and menacing soldiers. The story of Alina had a "happy ending," at least partially. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day, everything was silent and then someone opened the door. Sunlight streamed into the basement and Alina and her brother saw the friendly face of a Ukranian soldier. They were saved! Today, they both live in France. They are relatively safe. But what will happen to them and what does the future have in store for them?

Our sermon text today is also a story about rescue. It is the story of Jonah. The story of Jonah is a little story from the Old Testament and I will summarize it like this: Jonah was a prophet of God and as such, he received an assignment from God – go to the city of Nineveh and tell the Ninevites they should repent otherwise God would destroy the entire city. Jonah didn't obey. On the contrary, instead of going to Nineveh, he went to Jaffa. From then on, everything went downhill for him. He went into the depths of the ship but the ship was caught in a violent storm. Eventually, the sailors realized that the storm was God's punishment directed at Jonah. When they threw him into the sea, there was calm. But the story was not yet at an end. Jonah didn't drown right away but was swallowed by a whale and taken into the depths of the sea. He was swallowed up. This word, swallowed up, in the Old Testament, often has to do

with God's judgment. According to the Old Testament, people were often swallowed up by their sins or their enemies or even by death and now they are completely lost in the depths of the earth and without hope.

Do you know this feeling of being lost? Do you know the feeling of being in a dangerous situation? All around you there is danger. Like Alina from the first example, do you bring your legs close to your body and hide your head? Do you hope that the storm passes by? But there is no hope. Or do you try to run away like Jonah? Everything will just keep getting worse. Like the sailors in the small boat during the storm, do you try to scoop water out and paddle? You try to save what can be saved but you realize that sin is too great. The enemies you fight against are overwhelming and you stand before a heap of your own failed life.

Jonah is a prophet. He is a prophet even in this lost condition. As a result, this shows how things are with all of us humans. We are all lost. We all have rebelled against God. We all have run away from God. We have not done His Will and have gone after our own ways. We don't listen to God's commands but allow ourselves to be deceived by every lie of Satan's. And that's why we are lost. That's why we are like lost sheep and no longer know how to continue on in life. Each one of us is Jonah! Each one for themselves! And we must pray with Jonah: "All Your waves and Your billows passed over me. Then I said, 'I am driven away from Your sight!'" I can give even more examples. One thing is clear though. We can't understand God's way! Not even when God shows grace. Jonah had lots of time in the belly of the fish to think. He knew that he was guilty and thought: "I was the one to run away from God. I rejected God's assignment! And what will God do now? What if God abandoned me now because I deserted Him first? He has every reason to leave me now, just like I left Him. May I even pray to God when I know that I'm guilty?" Jonah is a prophet. He is a very unusual prophet because unlike all the other prophets, he gets everything wrong. In the end, he lands in the deepest darkness and forsaken by God. Yet he is and remains a prophet because he does exactly what all the other prophets do. Throughout his life, he points to Jesus.

When the Jews demanded Jesus give them a sign of His power, He dismissed it and gave the people, ironically, the example of Jonah as a sign. Because just like Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, so Jesus will be in the tomb for three days. This will be God's sign. God didn't come with force, which is what the Jews expected, rather He revealed Himself in the depths, yes in the depths of the cross and of death! Today is Easter. Today, it's about Jesus and His resurrection. Didn't Jesus have every reason to feel rejected by God? Jesus cried on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" Jonah could have prayed exactly like that. But with one difference: Jonah knew exactly why he was in this mess. He had brought all of this upon himself. But Jesus? Jesus didn't run away from God. Even in His deep anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus still prays: "Not My will but Your Will be done!" And Jesus did all of this for us. He did it for us because we constantly run away from God. He did this for us because we constantly find ourselves stuck in some tight spots of our own making. He did this for us because we will eventually taste the deepest darkness of death. He did this for us so that we can live! That's Jesus' whole plan, it's even hidden within Jesus' name because Jesus' name means "God saves!"

Jonah could also experience that. Even in the belly of the fish, he knew that and began to praise God. God saved him! Despite everything! God saved him and pulled him out of darkness! God didn't abandon him even when he abandoned God. Do you know that feeling when you are suddenly saved from a terrible situation? Alina from Kiev knows this feeling. After 5 days in darkness and fear, she could come into the light. Today is Easter. Jesus is risen! He spent three days in darkness. It was over for Him

for 3 days. He was in hell for 3 days. For 3 days, the disciples couldn't believe that God still exists. And then, the light came, then came resurrection. Jesus lives and we will also live! God let Jonah live. And we will also stay alive. Alina lives too. But what's next for her?

There is still war in Ukraine and we don't know what her future looks like. What was next for Jonah? Spit out, exhausted, he blinked his eyes, looked at the sun, and said: "A miracle happened! I live!" Jonah knew that he could no longer run away from God. He wouldn't do it again either. He had to fulfill his assignment. He had to go to Nineveh. He could only guess how that would turn out. He wouldn't understand God's ways in the future either and yet he remembered one thing deep in the back of his mind – God saves! That is God's plan. That is His name! Jesus! God saves! He saves Alina! He saves the lazy prophet Jonah. And He also saves you! Amen.