

Tuesday at Vespers
Jonah 1:17—2:10
April 29th, 2025
ELDoNA Synod and Colloquium
Salem Ev. Lutheran Church
Malone, TX
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Out of the Belly of Sheol

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“Then Jonah prayed unto Jehovah his God out of the fish’s belly. And he said, ‘I called by reason of mine affliction unto Jehovah, and He answered me; Out of the belly of Sheol cried I, and Thou heardest my voice.’”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear brothers in Christ, Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! It is this resurrection from the dead to which our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, refers when certain of the scribes and Pharisees asked of Him a sign to show that He was the Messiah. He had just cast out a demon that had caused a man to be blind and dumb, and yet, they asked of our Lord a sign. The signs proving that He was the Messiah were already on full display. They would only ask for a sign on account of their unbelief. The only sign mankind will receive in order to create and sustain faith in those who hear is the sign of Jonah. He was in the belly of a great fish for three days and three nights.

This was a foreshadowing to our Lord’s death and resurrection. Our Lord would be in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights. He would enter into the place of death. But He does not go into the grave on account of any sin that He has committed. Indeed, He is without sin! There is not one who can convict Him of any sin, for He is conceived and born without sin. This is why He becomes man, so that taking upon Himself our flesh, but without sin, He might free mankind from the bowels of the death and the grave.

The grave for mankind is a prison. It is a prison in which we are trapped on account of our manifold sins and trespasses. The Psalmist prays in Psalm 130, “Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord.” The Prophet Jonah from the belly of the great fish, cries to our Lord God, “Out of the belly of Sheol cried I, and Thou heardest my voice.” We sing in the Office of Vespers, “Make haste, O God, to deliver me. Make haste to help me, O Lord.” Such is the voice of the repentant sinner seeking the Lord God’s grace and mercy. We do not cry these words of rescue because our lives are filled with joy and mirth. No, my dear brothers, we cry for help—for rescue from the prison house of death—because we are trapped in the prison of death and the grave. Our sins have bound us firmly in death’s grasp.

This is what the Prophet Jonah cries. This is what the Psalmist, King David, cries in Psalm 130, after the Prophet Nathan came and rebuked him for his sins of adultery and murder. This is what we cry when the sting of the Law changes our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, to see the corruption that is inherent in our cold, dead hearts. We see that we will be eternally lost if a Savior does not come and rescue us. We are trapped in the prison house of death. We are bound in the belly of the great fish, like the Prophet Jonah. There is no way that we can rescue and save ourselves. We are utterly at the mercy of the depths of the prison in which we are bound. We are at the mercy of the grave. But, the grave shows no mercy.

Our Lord + Jesus, however, hears our cries for mercy. He heard the Prophet Jonah from the belly of the fish. He comes to us bearing our flesh, so that He might deliver us from death and the grave. He comes to set us free from the bonds of death and the grave. He goes into the belly of the earth for three days and three nights to deliver us from the steel grip in which sin and death has us crushed. This is the sign of the Prophet Jonah. He was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights. He was vomited again onto dry land, and was delivered from his prison. Our Lord on the third day broke the chains of sin and death, and gave us hope in eternal life.

This is the only sign which mankind will receive. All of our preaching is the same preaching as our Lord + Jesus. He came preaching repentance towards the forgiveness of sins. We preach the Law to show men their sins, so that in preaching the Gospel they hear the words of Absolution, that their sins are forgiven for the sake of the Christ, and Him alone. We preach the Christ crucified, but even more so, we preach the crucified Christ Who has risen from the dead. His death atoned for our sins once and for all. And His resurrection proves that that sacrifice is accepted by the heavenly Father. We can firmly place our faith and trust in the promises given by our Lord + Jesus. For He declares that His death frees us from the bonds of sin and death. His death destroys death, and His rising to life again assures us that we too have everlasting life.

This is the essence of every sermon. Every sermon is an expanded Absolution. We preach the Law to lead hearts to repentance, so that we may preach the Gospel to comfort repentant hearts with the healing balm of the Gospel.

Our Lord + Jesus was in the belly of the earth for three days, so that when we cry out for mercy, that mercy may be granted to us. Those who have been entrusted into our care, those who we have been given to shepherd and care for, in their sorrows and contrition, cry out for mercy. They cry as we have sung this evening, "Make haste." The Lord + Jesus has given us this authority. He did it on the day of His resurrection from the dead.

The Apostles were in the Upper Room, with the doors barred for fear of the Jews, and our Lord + Jesus appeared unto them and breathed on them, and said, "Receive the Holy Ghost, whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." The Lord has given to us the Office of the Holy Ministry. We can bind and loose sins. All those who in their unbelief ask for signs and wonders from the Lord + Jesus, all those who live in open and manifest sins, we have the authority to bind their sins, as long as they do not repent.

This is why we should not use the binding key lightly. For we have the authority to lock men up in the grave; to keep them in the prison of death. We can place them, like the Prophet Jonah, in the belly of the great fish. This should never be done out of spite or anger, but always to lead men into repentance. And when repentance comes, we should be eager and ready to use the loosing key to bring men out of the great fish, and place them on dry ground. We should ever be ready to free men from the bonds of sin and death.

The Lord + Jesus has given us that authority because He has firmly defeated death and the

grave by His own death upon the tree of the holy cross. Like the Prophet Jonah, who was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, our Lord + Jesus was in the belly of the earth for three days and three nights. Out of the depths, from Sheol, our Lord + Jesus has pleaded on our behalf to free us from bonds of sin and death. The Lord has heard His cry!

We are set free! He has delivered us from death and the grave. We have been vomited out of the grave, for the Lord + Jesus has commanded it to release us. It can no longer keep us in its belly. It must obey the Lord + Jesus for He has claimed the victory over sin and death. They must do as He says. He can bind the impenitent in the grave; He can keep them in the belly of the great fish, or He can free us from bonds of Hell and the grave. This same authority He has bestowed upon us, His faithful Ministers. We too, can bind and loose from death and the grave. We have this authority—the Lord has given us this authority—because He has risen from the dead, and broken the bars of the prison house of sin and the grave.

Therefore, my dear brothers in Christ, let us rejoice that such authority has been given to man from the Lord. Let us grant the mercy to those who cry out in their sorrow and contrition with the consoling words of the Absolution. For our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, has risen from the dead, and opened up the way to everlasting life for all those who cling to Him in faith; all those who hear the voice of the Lord's mercy, and rejoice that for His sake their sins are forgiven. Hallelujah! Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord + Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same + Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ + Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!