

It is a startling and unexpected place to find hope.

God had told him to go one direction. He had deliberately chosen to go in the exact opposite direction.

God wasn't about to let him get away with it. A short boat ride and violent storm later and he found himself over the side of the boat, in open water. I don't know if he could swim – but it doesn't really matter because the only difference in the story would have been drowning immediately or drowning when his arms and legs gave out from exhaustion.

Down and down he sank, panicking, his body screaming for him to take a breath but nothing around him but water. Did he have a moment of repentant resignation? This is what he deserved for deliberately disobeying God. I don't know.

Down and down he sank, until... until he was swallowed – swallowed whole by a giant fish.

He wasn't drowning anymore, but was he really any better off in the belly of a giant fish?

By now, many of you know the story. It's Jonah.

Let me read the account of Jonah for you... (Read Jonah 1)

Maybe by now some of you are wondering, "Why?"

This is an Easter sermon, and I'm talking about Jonah. Why? It's a good question.

Let me give you two good reason why we should think about Jonah on Easter.

First, because Jonah is a Type of Christ.

The whole Bible is about Jesus – even the Old Testament, the first two thirds of the Bible that was written before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

The Old Testament is filled with promises about Jesus. Sometimes those promises are explicit – Like God promising that he would crush the devil's head right after the fall into sin in Genesis 3, or if you haven't done it already this Holy Week, read Isaiah 53. It is this beautiful predictive promise of what Jesus did for us on his cross.

Some of the promises about Jesus in the Old Testament are explicit – they are obvious. There are other promises about Jesus that aren't as obvious at first glance but are still powerful. One such less-obvious predictions are called Types of Christ. There are certain people and events in the Old Testament that don't explicitly mention Jesus, but they are certain people and events that are a form of foreshadowing – they are these fuzzy mirror images; people and events that are a lot like Jesus in a certain way, that teach us about Jesus.

David is maybe the most prominent Type of Christ in the Old Testament. David was a shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. David became a king. Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. David is described as a man after God's own heart. Jesus was declared the Son of God, in whom the Father was well pleased. And the comparisons go even further than that.

David is a Type of Christ, so too is Jonah.

During the first Holy Week (Jesus' last week before his death), the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law were still refusing to believe in Jesus, and they were demanding a sign from Jesus. "Prove to us that we should trust you."

Jesus said to them in Matthew 12, "No sign will be given you to except the sign of Jonah." Then Jesus makes the connection, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

So, why talk about Jonah on Easter, because in the story of Jonah we see our creative, story-weaving God at work. Long before Jesus was in the grave three days, he guided the life of Jonah in this extraordinary way so we could have this amazing mirror image – a sinner receiving punishment he deserve spending three days in the belly of a fish; a Savior who received the punishment *we* deserve spending three days in the heart of the earth.

That is the first reason to talk about Jonah on Easter – this cool connection between the Old and New Testament.

The second reason: It is a startling and unexpected place to find hope.

Just a bit ago I read Jonah chapter 1. Now I'm going to read Jonah chapter 2... (Read Jonah 2)

It's a startling and unexpected place to find hope.

He is describing the panic of drowning and he is filled with hope. He has given up on life because he is receiving punishment he knows he deserves and his prayer to God is saturated with hope.

It is a startling and unexpected place to find hope – from inside the belly of a giant fish.

Perhaps just as startling and unexpected a place as a graveyard... When very early in the morning some women who had watched their Savior die, gingerly made their way to his tomb. Mourning, heartbroken women in a graveyard – not exactly a place one expects to find hope. And yet, on Easter we see those women sprinting with joy from that graveyard, bursting with a hope-filled message: **He is not here! He is risen, just as he said!**

This is a defining characteristic of the Christian story – hope in the most startling and unexpected places – in the belly of a fish; in a Jewish graveyard.

So, why talk about Jonah on Easter? Because Jonah’s life is not only a mirror of Jesus’, it is a foreshadowing mirror of your own life.

Do you ever feel like you are drowning?

Ever feel like you have been hurled into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, where the currents of life swirl about you, out of your control, pushing you, crushing you?

Maybe you can swim for a while, but as wave after wave crash over your head, your body and soul get more and more exhausted.

Maybe the crashing wave that pushed you under is COVID-19, that sprang up almost over night and proved to billions of people that they didn’t have nearly as much control over their lives as they thought.

Maybe that wave that pushed you under is called cancer, or Alzheimer’s, or a recession. Maybe it is a million little waves – the daily pressures of life, the constant accusations of the world or your conscience that declare you are not nearly good enough.

Whatever it is, very often we Christians come to Easter feeling an awful lot like Jonah – pushed about by a world that is out of our control, barely keeping our heads above water, if at all. The real kicker is, like Jonah, we know we deserve it because these are just the wages of sin, rightly earned by people who have a knack for deliberately doing what God tells us not to do.

We come to Easter like Jonah, drowning in a world that is flooded with the wages of sin – and yet in this sin-soaked world, from the throats of drowning people on Easter morning come hymns, and prayers, and declarations of hope.

It is a startling and unexpected place to find hope – in a sin-soaked world, among sin-drowned people, like the belly of a giant fish, or a Jewish graveyard: hope.

Hope that, as Jonah put it, **“Salvation comes from the LORD.”**

And this isn’t a wishful thinking kind of hope (like, I hope the weather stays warm for the rest of spring). This is hope that is firmly grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

In a world that often feels like it is drowning us, here is the solid ground on which, like Jonah, exhausted and drowning people find ourselves vomited.

This is the solid ground where Jesus proves to you that his death on the cross for your sins worked. On Good Friday he wrote the check for your sins and on Easter Sunday the check cleared the bank. God accepted his Son’s payment on your behalf. You are forgiven. Even if your conscience and the world won’t let you forget that you are not good enough, your life is now hidden with Christ in God so that when God looks at you he sees his Son or daughter whom he loves, with whom he is well pleased.

This is the solid ground where Jesus proves to you that all of the things that are out of your control, remain firmly in his control. Even death remains in his control. And if death remains in his control so does COVID-19, so does cancer, so does Alzheimer’s, so does your job and the financial market.

The empty tomb is the solid ground where we find hope in a world that often appears and feels hopeless.

It is a startling and unexpected place to find hope – the belly of a fish, that Jewish graveyard, and right here, right now, in your life and mine. And yet, hope is exactly what we find because of Jesus.

So, why Jonah? Because his prayer is ours. His hope is ours. His confidence is ours. His Savior is ours.

Hear again Jonah’s prayer this Easter, a prayer of hope from a startling and unexpected place. Hear it, and make it your prayer, today and for the rest of your life... (Read Jonah 2)