

A man like Jonah



Jonah and the Whale, Cathedral of Kpalimé, Togo

God, we thank you for your love and grace, which are renewed daily. Let your love and mercy colour our thoughts, words and actions; that we may not deny others the grace on which we depend. Amen.

Walking with Rosie

All we like sheep...

by Gillian Cooper

It hasn't rained for weeks and the water in the stream is low. Rosie and I are just about to turn round to head for home when I notice a sheep approaching the water. It walks in, decides it is shallow enough, and paddles across to the next field, where presumably the grass is greener. Another sheep follows, then another, then they come running from the furthest

corners of the field, and soon the whole flock is in its new pasture.

We are like sheep, says the Bible. We can easily be led astray by the promise of greener grass. We can unthinkingly follow the crowd, even through water that's too deep for us. But Jesus is the good shepherd, the one who understands our tendency to wander off, to get lost and swept away. He is the one who guides us through life to the greener grass of our heavenly home. 🐏

Julian Smith *reflects on* Jonah 3:10 – end of 4

The word "Jonah" has entered the English language as shorthand for someone jinxed, who brings misfortune to others. But the biblical story is about much more than a man who's thrown overboard and swallowed by a fish; it explores the age-old tension between justice and grace. Jonah has been called by God to "cry out against" the city of Nineveh. His response is to take a ship for Tarshish and run away from God's call. God sends a storm, and to calm the storm Jonah insists on being thrown overboard, since the storm is God's judgement on his disobedience. Jonah is promptly swallowed by a large fish, which eventually spews him out on the shore. God calls Jonah again, and this time he obeys. His message moves the people of Nineveh to repent in sackcloth and ashes. In turn, God spares Nineveh the fate he'd prepared for them. Jonah is distraught and angry with God, feeling that he has been made to look idiotic. God teaches Jonah a final lesson through a bush that springs up quickly but dies after only a day. Jonah's God is just yet merciful: Nineveh is evil and should be destroyed, not spared. But God repeatedly spares it, and Jonah, for God is firstly merciful and then just.

Jonah stands for everyone, for it is easy for us, with our wrong ideas about God, to deny others the grace we all depend upon. 🐟

Creation Season

Part 4 – a rest for the earth

by Alan Jefferies

In Exodus (34:21) we read: "Six days you shall labour, but on the seventh day you shall rest." The sabbath was given not only for humans but for the land and all creation – a rhythm of work and renewal. People talk of "treading lightly" on the earth, and in the context of Creationtide, sabbath living can be seen as exploring rest, restraint and reverence as a means of honouring creation.

Some churches mark Creationtide by holding "forest church" services outdoors

– in both rural and urban communities. The emphasis is on renewing our connection with God's creation. This is a wisdom we often forget – ploughing on without pause, consuming without limit, filling every moment with noise and busy-ness.

There are two weeks left in Creationtide, during which you might decide, either as a church community or as an individual, to mark it by exploring sabbath living – whatever that means for you.

www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/season-creation 🐾

“Kindness is the noblest weapon to conquer with.”

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), churchman and historian