**You can run but you can’t hide!**

**Way In!**

Has anyone been to the Natural History Museum in Gothenburg yet? I haven’t given myself the time yet, but if you have been, or if you go, you will see the well preserved remains of a SLIDE Blue Whale that had was beached on the west coast near Gothenburg actually, even closer to here in Näset. Unfortunately they couldn’t get it back out before it died, but they did manage to preserve its body, and for a time, turn it into a small restaurant. It seems very fascinating, and I am hoping to go soon.

Ok, so we all know the story of Jonah, the big lesson about running away from God. Don't run, or you'll end up in a big fish. Ok, so your Sunday school teachers may not have put it quite like that, but the story of Jonah and the whale is a favourite amongst kids. But this story isn't just about obeying God, and God teaching us a lesson. This is much bigger, and I hadn't realised for myself what this hidden lesson was, but we need to look at the context of what is happening around this time.

**To get a bit of context**, SLIDE this is the mid-700s BC, and Jonah's main ministry was between 800 and 750BC.

King Jeroboam II had just won back the northern region of Israel from Damascus, who were a part of the Assyrian empire. Israel were celebrating, and they made the mistake of getting complacent with their favoured status with God. **Yes, God has been on their side, but they weren’t viewing it in the right way**. And this had become a pride in them that the Lord didn’t really see as healthy, so He had to humble them. And He did that by exiling Israel... Again... And this time it was out beyond Damascus into Assyria. That must have been a bit embarrassing for them.

Jonah was one of the prophets in which God gave the vision of this exile to. But being an Israelite, He also had the attitude that as he was an Israelite, he was better than the rest, so what God has asked him to do would not have gone down well and might have confused him a bit.

The Lord had given Jonah the mission of travelling to Nineveh, (the great city of the enemy) to warn them of coming judgement and ask them to repent.

***SLIDE Who were Nineveh?***

* Nineveh were a city in the middle of Assyria, so way into enemy territory.
* It was to be the capital of Assyria 25 years after these events.
* It was known in other books as having evil ways (Nahum)

**What? You want me to do what?** But if I go and they repent then they will also be in your favour!!

So Jonah took this into his own hands and went as far as he knew he could go in the other direction. SLIDE Tarshish, southern Spain.***(Southern Spain, in some ways you can't fault his choice of location, I mean if you're going to run from God, it might as well be southern Spain).***

**On the run**

Has anyone ever been on the run before? SLIDE Or at least had to run away from someone. For me I need to go back to school times when I was being bullied. I remember a few times when I had to run home the 1km from the bus stop (Forest Gump style) being chased by 1 or 2 of the boys who were bullying me. I managed to outrun them a lot of the time, but I had a head start by sitting at the front of the bus every day. It wasn't fun, and running from someone is stressful. But when you run from something there is always a fear, of what you are running from. I was running from a bully, but Jonah was running from God's mission for him. He was afraid of something.

Now Jonah and I were running for very different reasons, and I believe I was right to run, but Jonah was running because He didn't fully understand why He was being asked to do that. He knew what would happen, but He still had a lot of learn from God. And maybe some of us are in that position today, that something unexpected has come up in life, and you fully get why, but all we need to do in times like this is trust that God knows what He is doing, because in this story He does. There is never any need to run from God.

***Reasons that we run from God* SLIDE**

Here are a few reasons I thought of from my personal experience and from what I have seen in the Bible of why people might run from God and His ways. This list can most likely be added to, so it’s not conclusive. SLIDE But we can see a theme coming on here of **not fully trusting God with our lives**.

***Back to the story***: SLIDE So Jonah gets on the boat to Tarshish, and he’s hiding below deck. He has deliberately disobeyed God. And God doesn't just sit back and 'Say, oh well, let’s send someone else'. Jonah is the man.

There is a reason Jonah was chosen. Just as there is a reason you are chosen to be where you are right now. God didn't only see disobedience, He saw someone whose heart could be changed, and someone who He needed to teach for a bigger purpose.

So He set a storm upon the boat, and Jonah realising exactly what this was, knew he was busted. He can't do anything to get out of this. And he wasn't a heartless guy and didn't want the other sailors to come to harm, so He asked the sailors to throw him overboard, and when they did, the storm calmed and they knew the God of Israel was the real deal and they even started worshipping our God, instead of theirs.

But Jonah wasn't just left for dead. Now enter our big fish. SLIDE The bible says that the Lord provided a huge fish. May not have been a whale, but it was very likely. Now, scripture doesn’t really give too many details of what happened during the 3 days and night he was in its belly (there probably wasn't much to do), but it does give us Jonah's great prayer of repentance.

**The turn around**

Jonah’s prayer shows his humility and repentance. He thought he was a good as dead. The pride, the fall, he had messed up and tried to take it all into His own hands.

SLIDE But the end of the prayer in the centre point to this book. I will say 'Salvation comes from the Lord'. It is in God's hands. He is in control.

Jonah comes to a conclusion that most people come to when they spend quality time with God. Salvation come from God and God alone, and it comes through Jesus, because of the 3 days between the death and resurrection. SLIDE If we look to the NT for just a moment, Jesus even quotes this moment when he starts to give clues to His death on the cross to the Pharisees. This moment is very important to the grand story of God's plan for the salvation of the world.

**Nineveh**

SLIDE So Jonah gets to Nineveh (as we can see here, it is in the centre of Assyria), and it take him 3 days to go through the city, spreading the message. And I think it’s important to note here how he does it. SLIDE He goes straight in to the centre on the first day, shouting it aloud, '40 days and the judgement will come upon you'. He gets to the point, and his attitude still isn’t great here. Maybe secretly he’s enjoying the fact that He gets to be the one to tell Israel’s enemies of their impending doom.

But the king hears this, and believes him, and you see a city wide repentance, even down to wearing sackcloth (OT way of showing you were in a time of fasting and repentance), and following the ways of the Lord. This pleased God, and the judgement didn't come, because they turned to back God.

**Jonah's anger at God's compassion.**

Jonah isn't happy and we get to Jonah's attitude again. What was happening in Nineveh didn't sit right with Jonah, he was angry that the enemy wasn't destroyed as in the warning, and didn't like that they also had favour. He was angry with God because of a jealousy deep inside him that had come from generation of Israel who had believe they were God's favourites.

And God then decided to show Jonah one more lesson. SLIDE Jonah went up to the hillside to sulk, and watch the city. Likely in silent hope that the enemy would still be crushed. He made himself a shelter, but the Lord provided him a plant, which grew up high and covered him from the hot sun. Jonah was happy. But then God took the plant away. And Jonah got angry again.

Then God finally says to Jonah, ok, stop being such a baby. Is it really right that you are angry about the plant? Think about what is going on here.

Jonah, still kicking his toys about says, of course, and I wish I was dead.

Then here we have the knockout punch, the whole point of what Jonah went through...

SLIDE The Lord says.

 “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11**And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

He is saying, don't you dare be angry because of my compassion. There are people here, my creation who I love, and who have repented, because they listened to me. I don't want to harm anyone, but you think I would go so far as to just destroy them without giving them a chance.

God can only love. God is love, and cannot hate His creation. He loves believers and non-believers alike. That is truth right there.

God has compassion for everyone, so we can't hold it back from them. When we are selfish, and self-centred, we are holding back their experience of God's love. Why is it up to us to choose who experiences God love. God wants everyone to experience it.

Israel in this time can be compared to an athlete who has won a victory, but he feels he is invincible. (One I read up about this year had said that he had won his victory because he had God on his side. His mistake is to feel that God favours him over other athletes, and that other athletes are less important in God's eyes than him.

We cannot see ourselves as better as others just because we are Christians. God loves non-believers just as much as he loves believers. He has no favourites (apart from Jesus, and me). And if our attitude shows that, we are not living out the gospel. We are not showing love to other people.

**Response** SLIDE

SLIDE 1. Or maybe you are in a place where you are stuck, and you want to run, or do your own thing because God's way seems way too scary or uncomfortable. God's way is always more scary and uncomfortable, but that’s good. Because when we get too comfortable, we get selfish, we forget to look outwards to other people, and we miss out on the fullness of life that God wants for us. Then that gives birth to anger, and contempt and its never good to go down that road. That’s the road where people around us get hurt.

Maybe a response this morning, even as we come to the communion table, is to ask the Lord to help us understand what He is doing in our lives right now. You might be on the verge of running, (and running can even mean staying in a place when God wants you to move), ask God, what you want from me, or us.

SLIDE 2. or maybe our response this morning would be to look inwards at ourselves to see how we are looking outwards?

SLIDE

And finally, my prayer is that God will make us all that little but more uncomfortable, because it's in that place that can really rely on him, and there we understand more of what He is wanting to do in the big picture.