

FAITH QUEST -- St. Mary's Anglican Church, Regina

The Story of Jonah

Supplies needed for all lessons:

Landscape Fabric or black tablecloth/plastic to turn Oasis into a whale. This will have to be set up and taken down each week-end. **Coordinators to decide if this is something they want to collaborate on!**

Map of area where Jonah travelled

Additional Supplies For:

Let There Be Art!

T-shirts for children who don't bring one

One or two packages of iron on transfers for the computer (may be in Art cupboard, transfer design in filing cabinet)

Fabric Paint, sponges, mix paint with textile medium before using

Pieces of cardboard to put in T-shirts during painting

Iron & towel

Pray-Per-View

Video equipment

Drama

Cardboard Boat

Map for Jonah to hold

Landscaping fabric for draping over a table

Advance Preparation

Let There Be Art!

Children need to be told to bring white or pastel T-shirt for the lesson 2 weeks ahead of time.

1. Run the transfers off ahead of time (may still have transfer sheets in Art cupboard) so someone can iron them on while the lesson is being taught. **Note: Transfers need to be run off in mirror image so they iron on the correct way.** Once printed, trim the transfers slightly ie. round the corners. It would be wise to print one on plain paper first to make sure you have the mirror image.
2. Fish shapes cut from sponges for painting.

Pray-Per-View

1. Video clips -- preview so digital numbers of scenes match with lesson

Drama

1. Make a cardboard boat.
2. Make a simple map for Jonah to hold.
3. Black landscaping cloth or plastic to drape over table if the whale has not been built for all workshops in the rotation (see above).

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Background: The Story of Jonah

By Barbara McLeod-Christian Educator

God directs Jonah to go to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, to tell the people of Nineveh that God is angry at their wicked ways. Jonah doesn't want to do this. Presumably, Jonah views the Assyrians with distaste. They are foreigners and undeserving of God's mercy. Why should the God of Israel consider the vile Assyrians? So Jonah heads to Joppa, a non-Hebrew (?) port city and gets on a boat headed to Tarshish, in Spain. This is exactly the opposite direction from Nineveh, and could be considered the end of the world at the time. Jonah is seriously trying to get away from his appointed task. Why? Jonah views the Assyrians as violent warmongers (rightly so.) He probably would like to see God destroy them all, for all the hurt they have done to the people in the area. Why should he give them a message that could save them? In Jonah's mind, they do not deserve God's mercy.

Jonah boards the ship and heads out. The ship's sailors are not Hebrews. When the ship gets out to sea, a violent storm kicks in, terrifying the crew. They begin throwing stuff overboard in an attempt to lighten the load and save the ship. Being superstitious, they try to divine (casting lots) which of them angered the gods enough to cause the deadly storm. Jonah's name comes up. When confronted, Jonah tells them he is a Hebrew and is running away from the Lord. When asked what they should do, Jonah says to throw him overboard. The crew doesn't want to do this. How ironic that the non-Hebrews (thinking how Jonah views them) don't want to kill him and continue to try to row to shore. But eventually, they resort to throwing Jonah in and the storm abates. They decide to worship the Lord.

Jonah gets swallowed by a fish and so does not drown. He has some time to re-think his situation and realizes that God has saved his life. He eloquently changes his mind, repents, and praises the Lord. The fish deposits him on shore. Then God repeats his orders to Jonah, and this time, Jonah complies; resistance is futile. He goes to Nineveh and walks through the city proclaiming that in forty days Nineveh will be destroyed. Then, for Jonah, the worst possible thing happens- the people believed the message, decide to give up their evil ways and repent, from the King on down. The king ordered that everyone fast, even the animals, and he even wears sackcloth and sits in ashes. The people of Nineveh will receive God's mercy.

Jonah is livid. “See?” he says to God, “This is exactly what I was afraid of.” Jonah knew that God is merciful and would forgive the Assyrians if they repented. Jonah has been full of prejudice and hatred for the Assyrians, and does not want to accept that God would forgive them; they don’t deserve it. He would rather run away and get thrown overboard than give up his little world view that only he and his are deserving of God’s love and mercy.

Jonah is so upset about this that he tells God-“Go ahead, kill me, I can’t stand to see a happy ending for these people.” God replies, “What right do you have to be angry?” (Jonah 4:4) Jonah goes to pout up on a hill outside the city. God causes a plant to grow besides Jonah that provides him with shade and Jonah is pleased. Then God sends a worm that kills the plant, and Jonah is angry, so angry in fact, that he again wished he were dead. Jonah appears to be quite melodramatic. God questions Jonah about why he is angry about the plant. God explains that if Jonah can care about the plant so much when he had nothing to do with the plant, then he should understand why God cares about people like the Ninevites, people whom he created and loves (even if they are not Hebrews.) Should God not care for the innocents of Nineveh, who don’t even know what they are doing?

Our focus for this story is on God’s universal love. God loves all people, even those who sin or are ignorant of God. And as God did not turn his back on Jonah (as he was running away,) God does not turn his back on the people of Nineveh. How easy for us as a group (congregation, family, country) to feel self righteous and insular. We start to feel that only we are deserving of God’s message of love and mercy. Those different from us, those who have hurt us, do not deserve God’s love. And we’re not even going to tell them about it; we don’t want them to know. The story of Jonah illustrates in a humorous way that God will still love us even when we resist God’s call, and that all are worthy enough to hear the message.