

MONDAY
22 MARCH
 Susannah 1-9. 15-17.
 19-30. 33-62
 [or 41b-62]
 or Joshua 2:1-14
 Psalm 23
 John 8:1-11

TUESDAY
23 MARCH
 Numbers 21:4-9
 Psalm 102:1-3. 16-23
 John 8:21-30

WEDNESDAY
24 MARCH
 Daniel 3:14-20.
 24-25. 28
 Canticle:
 Bless the Lord
 John 8:31-42

THURSDAY
25 MARCH
 Annunciation of
 Our Lord to the
 Blessed Virgin Mary
 Isaiah 7:10-14
 Psalm 40:5-11
 Hebrews 10:4-10
 Luke 1:26-38

FRIDAY
26 MARCH
 Jeremiah 20:10-13
 Psalm 18:1-6
 John 10:31-end

SATURDAY
27 MARCH
 Ezekiel 37:21-end
 Canticle: Jeremiah
 31:10-13 or Psalm 121
 John 11:45-end

REFLECTION

Tensions are brewing to boiling point. The Gospel focus remains with John, as during the first half of the week we read most of chapter 8. In every passage Jesus clashes with his own people, who are confused, then angered by both



his actions and words. His actions provide signs in which they seem to detect the work of God, but his words drive them crazy. When Jesus declares his relationship with God, his Jewish hearers cannot get past blasphemy. When he talks about existing prior to Abraham they are incensed. Their default reaction is to want to stone him. Exploring these early chapters of John over two weeks clearly shows Jesus being extensively vilified by his unbelieving compatriots throughout his ministry. Historical hard-heartedness and rebelliousness against God's will and God's messengers are underscored by the accompanying lessons from the Old Testament. Saturday closes with Caiaphas declaring that one death is preferable to the nation's destruction and so the authorities prepare to arrest Jesus should he visit Jerusalem during Passover. While we are left to examine whether we ourselves are equally sceptical or hostile towards the radical grace of God's message, the scene is set for the brutal climax of Holy Week.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
 we remember the Church,
 praying that you heal her divisions,
 and wipe out her parochialism,
 so that she will stand devotedly with you
 as you journey to the cross.
 May she defend those who are persecuted,
 befriend those who are outcast,
 and share your generous, life-giving love.

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BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

PART XXXII – JONAH – A BOOK ABOUT COMPASSION

Richard Greatrex continues our book-by-book series about the Bible.

Despite its brevity – four short chapters, forty-eight verses in total – Jonah is rich in vocabulary and utilises a wide variety of Hebraic literary devices in its construction. It's theologically complex, psychologically intricate and irreducible to a simple overall message. Repeated readings reveal new layers of both meaning and mystery and almost every element, from the book's date to its genre, structural integrity and purpose, are continually contested by scholars.

At its opening God instructs Jonah, son of Amittai (a name that equates him with an obscure eighth-century BC Galilean prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25), to preach divine displeasure at the renowned wickedness of the Assyrian capital city, Nineveh. Jonah immediately disobeys. His flight in the opposite direction and the seaboard adventure that results in him being swallowed by a great fish and subsequently vomited ashore is one of the best-known Bible stories, quoted by Jesus himself (Matthew 12:38-42). During this journey, described with telling details, Jonah unwittingly leads a crew of pagan sailors into worshipping God and demonstrates surprising flashes of self-awareness and compassion, despite his overarching egotism.

The second half of the book begins with God calling Jonah again. This time he obeys, shuffles into Nineveh's suburbs and delivers his message of imminent destruction. The Ninevites take heed and all the city's inhabitants without exception, from king to livestock, demonstrate repentance. God relents from inflicting devastating punishment.

It is precisely why Jonah ran in the first place – knowing God was merciful but not wanting salvation for his Assyrian enemies. Stubbornly camping out on an exposed crag, he furiously hopes that God might recant and obliterate the city. Yet when a worm kills the bush God had caused to sprout up and shade him, empathy for the withered plant breaks through his anger. This sorrow over one living thing's demise becomes a microcosm of God's compassion for the vast human population of Nineveh. In the book's final words God's pity encompasses the city's many animals, extending divine care to all creation.

LIVE the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
 THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
 Caroline Hodgson
 and
 Heather Smith



Fifth week of Lent

Monday 22 March to
 Saturday 27 March
 2021

WEEK