

+ In Nomine Jesu +

Mark 16:1-8 (Jonah 3:1-10)

Date: April 19, 2025

Liturgical Date: Easter Vigil

Title: Salvation belongs to the Lord

*In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit*

*Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Alleluia!*

The prayer ascends from the deepest of bowels to the highest of heavens, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; To the roots of the mountains I went down, to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" The Lord appointed the great fish to swallow up Jonah. Jonah prayed to the Lord during those three days and three nights. Even though Jonah was in the depths and the Lord was in heaven, the Lord saved Jonah.

However deep the distress, the Lord answers. Nothing can separate Jonah from the Lord's salvation. Not Jonah's blatant disobedience - God said go to Nineveh, but Jonah went to Tarshish. Certainly Jonah deserved all that came his way - the storms, the hurling into the sea, the depths. Jonah was in such bad shape that anything that he could possibly trust in had failed him and was gone. When he is driven away from the Lord, he prays that his only hope is in the Lord. Only the Lord could bring up from the pit, from the depths. Only the Lord could save. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. The Lord hears the prayer. Jonah is saved. And his first task after being saved is that he is sent out to save others. The city of Nineveh is great, but their evil has come up before the Lord. Jonah receives again the word of the Lord. Now that the Lord saved you, Jonah, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.

Jonah is saved so that others would be saved. God shows mercy on disobedient Jonah and pity upon wicked Nineveh. Jonah goes towards city center and proclaims a very short sermon. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And, miracle of miracles, the city listens and turns and repents. They fast and put on sackcloth and sit in ashes. The people of Nineveh know their own evil and what their own evil deserves. They must change everything about their city.

Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish, the king decrees. The call to repentance has torn down every altar that their hearts had set up to false gods. Every confidence is futile except for confidence in the Lord's mercy.

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. To Jonah, the Lord's actions

were entirely predictable. Jonah, unlike the king, knew how God would act. I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. So the Lord is, and so the Lord does. The Lord saved Jonah from the depths, and the Lord saved Nineveh from the wickedness of their own ways.

Beloved in the Lord, on this most holy night, in which our Lord Jesus passed over from death to life, we behold the Lord's salvation - in our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Lord had pity on Nineveh, how much more does the Lord have pity on the whole world. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. How great was our distress. Weak. Sinners. The due punishment for our sins was death. But salvation belongs to the Lord.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. We are not ignorant like the king, asking "Who knows? God may turn and relent." We know Jesus. We are loved by God. We behold Christ dead for us. We are justified by his blood. We are saved from the wrath of God by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are brought up from the pit by God. Jonah in his distress called out from the depths, and after three days and three nights was vomited out upon the shore. Jonah's prayer for salvation from the Lord is answered. So also, as we cry out to the Lord in our distress, the Lord hears our prayers ascending to him, and he answers.

What are the depths that we have cried out of to the Lord? As we contemplate the new life, the resurrection, we remember those that we have mourned over. We have called out to the Lord when death seems to have the upper hand. Or we have called out when our own mortality is apparent to us. And, yes, the Lord hears and answers those prayers and saves, promising a joyous reunion in heaven and a resurrection of all flesh on the last day.

Jonah calls out from the depths. Jonah is the one responsible for himself being in the depths. He completely disobeyed the word of the Lord. His own behavior was destructive to himself - and to others, as he was first sent to preach repentance to Nineveh. Jonah tried to escape his calling, but Jonah could not escape God's mercy. The Lord found Jonah, and the Lord saved Jonah.

Neither can we escape God's mercy in our depths. Sometimes our own sins pile up, our addictions weigh us down to the depths. We realize that our distress is our own fault. The call to repentance must be heeded. Even when the distress seems inescapable and our sins and addictions lock us in, the Lord lifts us up from the pit and delivers us, just as he delivered Jonah. Jonah is saved as an example for us to see how the Lord saves even from the depths.

How the Lord saves Jonah is significant. Jonah is taken down to the depths. Jonah is as good as dead. Nobody can save him except the Lord. Jonah realizes his own sin deserves the depths, turns from his disobedience, and lives. The Lord lifts Jonah up out of the sea, from the belly of the fish. From death to life. And Jonah is delivered from death by the salvation of the Lord.

So it is in our baptisms. The life of a Christian is the life of a person saved by the Lord from death to life. The section on Holy Baptism in the Small Catechism explains the life of a Christian in the fourth question.

What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

The Old Adam in us should be brought to the depths. To the roots of the mountains I went down, to the land whose bars closed upon me forever. Repent therefore. The sins and evil desires should be left there in the depths, dead. The Lord saves us through the waters of baptism. Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. Salvation belongs to the Lord! The Lord gives new life. And we walk in that new life.

The fourth question continues, Where is this written? St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Rom. 6:4)

Baptism is a burial and a death. There's nothing symbolic about it - no allegories here. Baptism is new life, a washing of regeneration. A great reversal. The fish that swallows Jonah and carries him to the depths also vomits out Jonah to a new life. The water that drowns and kills also grants a rebirth. The cross which kills our Lord as our Lord Jesus carries our sins in his own flesh also gives a resurrection to us, even as our Lord was raised from the dead.

Jonah is surrounded by the depths for three days, thus looking forward to Jesus' temporary stay in the grave. Jonah is brought out of the depths to life after three days to point ahead to Christ bursting forth from his prison and leaving his tomb empty. Christ's death and resurrection are the Lord's salvation for you - from death to life. And your own baptism ties you into Christ's death and resurrection. As Jesus went from death to life, so you also go from death to life.

The fish could only keep Jonah for three days, then the fish vomited him out. The grave could only keep Jesus for three days, then our Lord bursts forth, triumphant. So it will be for you in the resurrection on the last day. You have nothing to fear from the grave, for its time is short. Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

The Lord did not abandon Jonah in the belly of the fish. Nor did the Lord abandon his Christ in sheol or let his holy one see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses, so preaches St. Peter. Nor will the Lord abandon you to the grave. As sure as Jonah is vomited, as sure as Jesus is raised, as sure as baptism gives new life, so the Lord will command the grave to spew you out when all things are made new.

Our Lord says in Luke's gospel, "no sign will be given... except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation." Jonah is raised to preach repentance and mercy to Nineveh. And many more are saved.

Likewise, Jesus is raised and more preaching follows, as he himself says after his resurrection, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

From death to life, then the word goes out. Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear. Repentance, mercy, forgiveness going out everywhere. From death to life. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. From death to life, you are raised to proclaim - *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia! Alleluia!* From death to life, salvation belongs to the Lord.

+ Soli Deo Gloria +

Rev. Michael J. Bahr