

21 September 2025 Jesus Jonah Me Readings Jonah 1:4-17 and Mark 4:35-41

Did you wake up this morning, stretch, smile and say, 'I feel like a God today'? On the other hand, do you wonder, 'I think I'll give up on this faith thing, and go off and find a place where God will leave me alone.' If there was a scale, though, where would you be, between Jesus and Jonah, or not even up to there?

I'd like to have a closer look at these two men, a prophet and a son of God, who were both in close conversation with God. Then, I'd like to think about how people responded to them, and finally, where we fit into all this.

God commands Jonah, the free-thinking, argumentative, cantankerous prophet to go to the enemy city and sort out the nasty, violent residents for him. 'I don't think so,' says Jonah, and sets off in the opposite direction. Right across the Mediterranean Sea, to a distant part of Spain or Portugal.

'Wait,' says God, 'that's independent thinking, certainly, and I have given people free will, but this is not what I asked you to do. There needs to be a storm.'

Now let's pause the Jonah story, and look in detail at what happens next, and how it compares with a brief moment in the life of our Lord.

Both of them find themselves in a storm at sea. Potentially a very scary moment. Both are sleeping; Jesus relaxed and unworried, catching up on his sleep after a crazy day. Jonah? Well, sleep disturbances, either insomnia or hypersomnia, can be symptoms of depression. How is Jonah feeling now he's decided to run away from God?

Both are woken by other travellers in the boat. Jesus is mildly surprised at their fear and chides them for worrying. They should have faith in him, after all. In Jonah's boat, there is full-on panic. The boat is in danger of breaking up, the sailors are chucking the cargo overboard to lighten the boat, and things are not getting any better. They resort to praying to their separate and individual gods. However, it's quite clearly Jonah who is the problem and they cross examine him: 'who are you? What's your job? Where are you from? Who are your people?' Jonah comes clean, Hebrew prophet, worshipper of the one God who made everything, running away. They had better throw him overboard.

The sailors are both aghast and amazed. They don't want his blood on their heads; they don't want to drown in this terrible storm. They try to save everyone by rowing back to shore, to no avail. So, they throw him into the sea.

How this resonates with me. Years ago now, Richard was preparing to climb Everest with a Joint Services team. At the time, 1 in 8 Everest climbers who climbed over 8,000 feet did not return home. There were 36 in the team. We made all the appropriate preparations. Will in order, power of attorney in place. I held my breath. It seemed to me that if I got rid of some of my possessions, things might go well. How silly! God held him in the palm of his hand, and everyone came home safely.

Of course we should see to all the things of this world, but failing to trust God, throwing things overboard, rowing towards the shore in the midst of the storm, praying to crystals or resorting to favourite addictions, none of that will help. As Jonah does, we need to boldly declare who we are, who is our Lord, and we must submit to his authority. What is it that makes Jonah finally speak up and admit his fault? Courage? Faith?

Compassion for others? The cold realisation that it is his responsibility to make that final sacrifice to save them?

Now look at the sailors' reaction. They are incredulous ... and utterly convinced. Stunned, they worship God, make sacrifices and promises to him. Even when God is correcting Jonah's mistakes, he is using him as an outstanding prophet, revealing his, God's, majesty and power, to this crew of non-believers!

Jonah is condemned to 3 days in the fish, and a second chance to do God's will. He takes on the task with great daring and succeeds. The people of Nineveh accept God and ask his forgiveness.

When Jesus calms the storm, his disciples are also shocked, awe-struck, astounded. Matt 8:27: "The men were amazed and asked, 'What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey Him!'"

Their faith and devotion grows and grows. Jesus, worshipped, and adored by multitudes, submits to the will of God, faces death, with faith, courage and compassion for others, the cold realisation that it is his responsibility to make that final sacrifice to save others.

Jesus is condemned to 3 days in the underworld, only to come back alive and do God's will, again and again Jesus forgives and rescues us. All those who meet him afterwards are utterly convinced of the strength of his love, of God's omnipotence, of the undeniable truth of his sacrifice.

What do we have in common with Jonah, the obstinate, perverse, extreme, challenging, sulky, argumentative man?

What do we have in common with Jesus, the determined, strong, unwavering, shocking and disruptive, man and God, obedient and utterly compelling?

We are mere humans, a poor shadow of Jonah even. What we do have is God's spirit. We **can** wake up and stretch and smile and maybe even feel like God! With his help and guidance, just like Jonah, we can summon up all our courage, shake off the seaweed, and set off into the world as Matthew says:

Chapter 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Thank God.

Fleur Pelly, 21 September 2025