

Michaelmas 4 | Trinity 21 – St. Matthew 16:1-4

The Sign of Jonah is Always for You,
In Fair and Stormy Times

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Ser. #320-16

We pray: Lord Jesus, as Jonah rose from the water tomb to a life of repentance, so bless us through our watery baptism to Life. Amen.

In the name of the Father and the Son ☩ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Dear fellow redeemed,

We are going to hear Jesus refer to 'the sign of Jonah' in our text.

What does He mean by it? What is Jonah's sign, He speaks of?

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We read as follows in Jesus' name.

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.

(ESV)

So far the Words of our text.

These are Your Words, heavenly Father.

Sanctify [us] in the Truth. Your Word is Truth. (John 17:17)

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The "sign of Jonah" is... his resurrection from the watery grave.

No doubt, even if you don't know many Bible stories,

you have at least heard of the Jonah story.

How he sailed away from God's command to preach to Nineveh,

the capital city of Israel's enemies, the merciless Assyrians...

How the Lord caused a storm on the sea so that the sailors

threw Jonah into the sea, and...

How a great fish swallowed him and eventually, and,

quite contrary to nature, spewed him out on the beach.

But if this is the only part of the story that you know/remember,

then there is more for you to learn or recall.

As Jesus hints at in our text, Jonah's story isn't only about Jonah.

Sure, it happened. It's a real account.

But the story is actually about pointing us to Jesus.

Jonah being thrown to his death because of sin...

Jonah being in the belly of the fish for how long? 3 days.

Jonah being vomited out of the fish alive... a resurrection story.

Of course, Jonah was thrown into the sea because of his own sins, and he didn't actually die. We know that.

It was not identical to the death and resurrection of Jesus,

but it is a type, an OT event that foreshadows the NT reality.

That is what Jesus was getting at when He spoke of

the "sign of Jonah."

But for at least one cohort of those opposing Jesus in our text, the story of Jonah wasn't viewed as a real account,

nor was it to point to God's promised Christ and salvation.

You see, the Sadducees prided themselves on their liberalism,

not being bound to Scripture or its teachings.

They didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead. ^{Acts23:8}

And for the Pharisees, I wonder what they thought of Jonah.

These prided themselves on their conservatism,

strictly attempting to observe God's Law & man's traditions.

I wonder if they looked at it more from a moralistic point of view,

so that the lesson they took away from Jonah's story was:

"See what happens when you disobey God."

Now normally, the Pharisees & Sadducees didn't get along.

But when it came to confronting Jesus, they had a mutual desire: to discredit Him before the people.

In reality, there was no sign that they would be willing to accept.

According to the Gospels, Jesus performed 1,000s of miracles

and many in their presence already.

Yet all these, they poo-pooed as insufficient proof,

though not even Moses had performed such acts of mercy

or even the sheer number of miracles in his day.

Just like their later promise that if Jesus came down off the cross, they would believe Him, it was only a taunt, a temptation, not a genuine request for proof.

Moses ran into the same issue with Pharaoh, who saw the signs but hardened his own heart against the Lord.

Jesus, knowing their hearts, did not give in to their trap.

There was no reasoning with them, no proving anything to them,

no sense in arguing with them.

Instead, like so many other times before and after,

He used a natural part of their daily lives to illustrate the spiritual part that they were not understanding.

He gave them a 'sign from heaven' -- the red sky, a sign that in one circumstance meant fair weather, and in another circumstance meant stormy weather.

This illustration was not a compliment to them.

They were no meteorologists, no weather experts,

but they could still interpret this basic sign from heaven.

But the Pharisees and Sadducees were supposedly experts in the biblical studies, the "meteorologists" of the Bible.

And yet, they couldn't (or wouldn't) admit the signs they saw from Jesus as being any indication of whom He might be.

They were so blinded by their own opinions and traditions, that they failed to read Scripture and its signs

with true understanding.

But that didn't mean that Jesus would not testify to them.

He testified saying that they would "see" a sign,

and that sign would be a sign of God's mercy and grace,

but that same sign for them, who disbelieved Jesus' Words, would be a sign of condemnation.

Jesus' death and resurrection were that sign.

Their reality means God's grace and mercy for those that believe.

They mean Christians too shall rise from the dead, as Jesus did.

But for those that do not believe, this very same sign of life, which they reject or despise by their indifference, will be what condemns them, since they would not believe.

Now, technically, the Jewish leaders did not see Jesus risen.

He only showed Himself to His disciples.

But they could have seen all the proof that was available, from the empty tomb to frightened guards, to the boldness of the disciples later on to preach it in spite of being persecuted and martyred.

Not to mention that these Jewish leaders couldn't produce Jesus' body, so they bribed the tomb guards to lie.

But what about us in our day? We can't go back in history to witness what the Jewish leaders & Jesus' disciples witnessed.

All we have is a really old book as a written record of what they saw and heard, both of Jesus and the Jewish leaders.

And of that, we don't even have the original copies.

And though there are 100s of 1,000s of manuscripts and many ancient manuscripts, & biblical quotes of the Fathers, and much more evidence for the textual authenticity of the Scripture that we can't cover in a 19 min. sermon...

This leads many today, like the Sadducees, to doubt/disbelieve what was written.

They can't understand or explain by natural causes how these miracles happened, and so they say they can't be true.

It is interesting that they have as hard a time with Jonah, as they do with Jesus.

To them, Jonah is just a giant fish story, made up for effective teaching.

To them, Jesus was truly an effective teacher, but just that.

Not the Son of God. Not the Christ. Not the world's Savior.

Others appreciate the Bible more for its moralistic value.

They pride themselves on their conservatism, they believe it is all true.

But their take away is generally something that they must do,
rather than what Jesus has done for them.

They like the acronym for the Bible:

Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth.

And sometimes we can fall into these temptations as well.

The fact is, we can't explain how exactly Jonah's fish did it,
or how Jesus could calm the waves by His Word.

But recognizing that God is the Creator of all things,
and that He, not only established the laws of nature,
but also usually keeps them operating by His Word,
we don't have a problem believing He could make a fish
do such a thing.

How could God raise someone from the dead?

We don't know or understand the science behind it,
but God is the one who gave life to man in the first place.

Do we stop existing because we don't understand how we do?

Scripture is God's revelation to us. He used men, His ministers,
to write down what He would have us know about creation,
about salvation, and about how we are to receive Him today.
This Word of God is the spiritual armor of which St. Paul wrote
in our Epistle lesson:

**Therefore take up the whole armor of God,
that you may be able to withstand in the evil day,
and having done all, to stand firm.**^{Ephesians6:13}

It is by the mysterious and great power of the Holy Spirit
that hearing this Word, you are able to believe in Jesus
and His teachings, and His death, and His resurrection,
and that they were all for you,
to forgive your doubts and disbelief and
to strengthen your faith in both the fair and stormy times of life.
You don't stop believing because you don't understand
how the Spirit works.

And yet, sometimes we also fall into the temptation to think

of the Bible as a book of shoulds and should nots.

As if by obeying God's instructions we can avoid His wrath.

As if the lesson of Jonah is that it is our duty to preach
God's Word to others, even our enemies.

But then we take upon a burden that is not ours to bear.

For God did not call all of us to be preachers, but some.
Or considering our sermon text, that we should not be like
those evil Pharisees and Sadducees who disbelieved Jesus.
But we should believe Him.

But who of us can cause faith to be strengthened in ourselves?

Who of us can build up the joy in ourselves that overflows
into speaking to others about their Savior and His forgiveness?

This is not our work but the Holy Spirit's.

And He does not do it by threat or burden of conscience,
but by the Gospel, by giving you the joy of your salvation.

Jonah's resurrection story is also a forgiveness story, isn't it?

Jonah didn't earn a second chance, God forgave it to him.

So too, Jesus' resurrection story is also a forgiveness story.

By His resurrection from the dead, the Father proves that
Jesus' death on the cross, bearing all your sins of doubt,
disbelief, as well as your sinful tendencies to moralism,
really was all God demanded in payment.

By the blood of Jesus, you are forgiven all your sins.

You don't need to know how this miracle of spiritual life works,
that's God's department.

But you should know how you are to receive it,
so that you may receive it regularly and often in both fair
and stormy times of life.

You receive it simply by hearing.

Hearing God speak in His Word words of forgiveness.

And by hearing, you receive the full armor of God that is able
to withstand the evil day and extinguish Satan's darts.

By your Baptism, the sign of Jonah is given to you,
as you die in the water and rise from your watery tomb

with Christ in His death and resurrection.
By the Lord's Supper, the reception of the crucified and risen
body and blood of your Lord and Savior.

Again, you don't have to know how these things work,
but that they work, by the same powerful Word
that Created the world in 6 days, and sustains it still today.
that caused the city of Nineveh and Jonah! to repent,
that calmed the wind and the waves to be still,
that healed the centurion's child from so far away,
and that declared your salvation **finished** and proved it
by His resurrection from the dead.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forevermore. Amen.*
Soli Deo Gloria