



St. Mary's Church of England VC Infant School

Engaging with the Christian distinctiveness of our school

Six key ideals for St Mary's Infant School

1. **Stimulating Surroundings**
2. **Learning Together, Flourishing Together**
3. **Nurture Creativity, Encourage Curiosity**
4. **Uphold the Values of God**
5. **One Message**
6. **Connecting Communities**

Bible Passage Theme: The Story of Jonah

Bible Verse Theme: Thy Kingdom Come (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2)

A short explanation of how they all fit together

Everyone thinks they know the story of Jonah!

Man told by God to warn the people of Nineveh. Man too frightened to go, so boards ship going in the other direction. Man thrown overboard following a big storm and swallowed by big fish. Man spat out on beach and learns his lesson. Man goes to Nineveh and delivers message

Everyone thinks they know the meaning of the story. It's about obedience, we think. Nothing could be further from the truth!

What we need to hold in our minds is that Nineveh is the enemy. When Jonah was told by God to go to Nineveh to preach destruction by God because of their wicked ways, it would be a bit like you or I being asked to travel to an enemy and tell them that our God was going to destroy them because they weren't being kind. Would you do that? No, nor would I. It would require foolhardy bravery of the most extreme sort!

So, I can quite understand Jonah trying to get out of the way. But fortunately, God doesn't give up as easily as we do!

To remind you of the rest of the story which is often forgotten and suggestions how the strands may connect:

- God asks Jonah to perform a dangerous difficult and frightening job. **Connecting communities**
- Jonah runs on board a ship going to Tarshish in the opposite direction manned by foreigners. **Learning together, flourishing together**
- A great storm arises through which Jonah sleeps. **Stimulating surroundings**
- The sailors panic and throw the cargo overboard. Eventually they wake Jonah. They all pray to their gods, but Jonah knows he is the reason for the storm. He persuades them to throw him overboard and they reluctantly agree. The storm ceases and God sends a big fish to save Jonah. **Nurture creativity, Encourage curiosity; Uphold the values of God**

- Jonah is in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights **One Message (This is likened in the New Testament to the 3 days of Jesus' death before he was raised to life on Easter Day)** He praises God in a song. He is spat out on the beach. **Learning together, flourishing together**
- God calls Jonah again and this time Jonah obeys, travels to Nineveh, a huge city, and proclaims, *"After 40 days, Nineveh will be destroyed"* **Connecting communities**
- The people of Nineveh change the way they live their lives. They stop eating rich food to show they are sorry. The king commanded all people and all animals to wear rough cloth to show their sadness at the bad things they had been doing. **Uphold the values of God**
- God changes his mind and forgives them. Jonah gets very cross because it has made him look silly. He wants his enemies to be punished. He sulks. He says, *"I knew this would happen. I knew it when I was in my own country. It is why I ran quickly away to Tarshish. I knew you were a God who is kind and shows mercy. You don't become angry quickly. You have great love. I knew you would rather forgive than punish them."* **Learning together, flourishing together**
- God says, *"Do you think it is right for you to be angry?"* **Uphold the values of God**
- Jonah stomps off and sits down outside the city. God made a castor-oil plant to grow up to give Jonah shade in the hot sun. Jonah was very pleased to have the plant but the next day God made a worm eat the plant, so it withered, and Jonah got very sunburnt. **Nurture creativity, Encourage curiosity**
- Jonah gets even more downhearted, weak in the heat, and angry. God asks, once again, *"Do you think it is right for you to be angry?"* After Jonah says he thinks it's fine to be angry God delivers a final statement which contains the real meaning of the book. *"You showed concern for that plant. But you did not plant it or make it grow. It appeared in the night, and the next day it dies. Then surely, I can show concern for the great city Nineveh. There are many animals in the city. And there are more than 120 000 people living there. Those people simply do not know right from wrong."* **Learning together, flourishing together; Nurture creativity, Encourage curiosity; Uphold the values of God; One Message; Connecting communities**

The story of Jonah is therefore really about God's love for the whole world rather than just the people we like or who are the same as us. It encourages acceptance, allows second chances and calls us to tolerance of people who might be very different from us even though they look the same. In a school which has a low proportion of other faiths and a high white British percentage of children it is vital for us to address questions of diversity and tolerance. The story of Jonah demands that we do just that.

It is easy to draw out many of our theme Christian values from the story: Compassion, respect, sharing, trust, tolerance, humility, self-esteem, peace, thankfulness, responsibility, friendship, perseverance, forgiveness, courage etc

Because (for me at any rate) it has a bit of a comic book, tongue in cheek style which encourages you not to take the narrative too seriously, it is easy to regard it as a story with a meaning rather than as historical truth. It is a very attractive story for KS1 children because of the high level of action and adventure!

The overriding desire of God in the story of Jonah seems to be that of making the world a better place and encouraging human beings to behave more thoughtfully. Rather as if we were aiming at making the world in which we live more like heaven, the Kingdom of God. As if we were engaged in a mission to help God's Kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. This, of course, is a prayer that many children know and pray frequently, so it seems a natural verse from the bible to use as a reminder of what we are about as a school: the aim to allow our children to grow into whole human beings who are in touch with their emotions and able to contribute to the world to make it a better place. It also pulls us straight back into the Christian Distinctiveness of our school as Jesus was the person who first prayed the Lord's Prayer.

Quotations from the International Children's bible