

Trinity 15 2020 – 20th September

20 th September Trinity 15	9.30 Holy Communion	Jonah 3 v10 – 4 v 11 p928 Philippians 1 vv 21-30 p1178 Matthew 20 vv 1-16 p987	A&M 336 All My Hope Psalm 145 334 A Man There Lived 417 Praise We Now 356 Father, Lord of 421 Strengthen For Service
20 th September Trinity 15	11.00 Holy Communion	Jonah 3 v10 – 4 v 11 p928 Philippians 1 vv 21-30 p1178 Matthew 20 vv 1-16 p987	MP 15 At the Name of Jesus 10 Amazing Grace Psalm 145 249 Turn Your Eyes Upon 242 Thou Art Worthy 274 Who is on the Lord's?

KEEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy: and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

One of the cruises I went on with my mother started from the capital of Argentina, Buenos Aires. It is a beautiful city. Wide avenues are lined with Bougainvillea, whose purple and pink and red and mauve flowers perfume the air. There is a splendid cathedral and there are many fine churches. There are also, however, terrible slums where people live in grinding poverty. The metropolitan cathedral is located in the Plaza de Mayo. When we were there, there were silhouettes stencilled onto the pavement to represent those political opponents who were “disappeared” by the military junta – taken away, imprisoned, tortured and killed without any form of trial, their families and friends just not told what had happened to them. Another sight we saw was the monument to the Argentine soldiers who had been killed in the Falklands War, many of them young conscripts with little training and inadequate equipment, but some constituting a fearsome fighting force of crack troops.

We left Buenos Aires and sailed across the River Plate to Montevideo where you can still see the German battleship Graf Spee scuttled in December 1939. Again, apart from this ugly reminder of war, a beautiful city in a beautiful country with miles of golden sands delimiting an azure ocean.

Our next port of call was Stanley in the Falkland Islands. The Falklands rather reminded me of Scotland. The houses are not unlike our older dwellings, but roofed with corrugated iron instead of tiles or slate. The cathedral is like an English parish church. There is even a Coop with a sign just like the one at Cuxton. The weather was cold and gray. In Port Stanley, we saw the monument to the British soldiers who died in the Falklands War. At the time we went, about twenty years ago, much of the islands was still covered by minefields. I believe we only saw one penguin. I thought at the time how terrible it was that so many young men on both sides had lost their lives fighting over these little parcels of land in the South Atlantic. No matter what were the rights and wrongs of the quarrel between us and the Argentines, war is a terrible way to settle a dispute, though only too often we fail to find a better one.

As it happens, I am now reading the autobiography of Simon Weston, the best known survivor of the conflagration on the Sir Galahad when it was bombed at Port Pleasant. He describes the inferno and what he writes is like a description of hell. Many lives were lost. Many men were burnt, Simon probably the worst of the injured who ultimately survived. Horrified as I was, I could not help but be aware that we also were seeking to inflict injuries and death on our opponents. War is a terrible way to settle any dispute.

There are positives in the book. Some men displayed enormous bravery in going back into the flames after they had escaped in order to attempt to rescue others. Some of those injured displayed astonishing courage and fortitude and even humour. The medics worked miracles saving lives at the outset and performing amazing reconstructive surgery on their patients for months and even years afterwards. The skills doctors have learned treating battlefield casualties have subsequently been applied effectively to the treatment of injuries caused to civilians by accident and disease. Much good has come out of the horrors of war, but not enough, I think, to counterbalance those horrors. I'm writing this sermon as a former officiating chaplain to RAF Manston in the week in which we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

So Jonah, why didn't he want to go to Nineveh and preach God's Judgment against the Assyrians, the wicked people whose capital city Nineveh was? Was he afraid of the Ninevites? They were a notoriously cruel and powerful people. Their armies had conquered many of the nations of the Middle East, including Northern Israel. They had besieged Jerusalem. They mocked God and they caused tremendous suffering wherever they went, building their empire at the expense of the peoples they vanquished. Jonah would have had good reason to be afraid to go to Nineveh with a message from God of judgment and the imminent destruction of the wicked city. Yet the reason Jonah gives to God for his reluctance to preach judgment against Nineveh is this: *I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.* Whether he is sincere or not, Jonah is claiming that the reason he didn't want to preach to the Ninevites was that he knew that God would forgive them if they repented and Jonah didn't want the Assyrians to be forgiven. Their empire was evil and Jonah wanted to see it destroyed.

I think we can understand that. We demand justice. If we are caught up in a war, we naturally want to win. If we didn't think we were fighting in a just war, I hope that we wouldn't fight at all. We are naturally angry about the atrocities committed by the enemy. We may feel justified in the actions we believe we have to take in order to ensure victory. But God shows Jonah a more excellent way – the path of repentance and forgiveness. The cycle of violence can only be broken by a willingness to forgive, to have compassion on the enemy, to love even, as Christ loved us while we were yet sinners. That's incredibly hard to do. Forgiveness is an enormous thing to ask of the victims of terrible atrocities, such as those the Assyrians inflicted on Israel and her neighbours and those the Argentine bombers inflicted on the British soldiers sent out in a Task Force to recover the Falklands.

Ultimately, we would only find the strength to forgive like that in the light of S Paul's words in today's epistle. *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*