

## St Arvans Church Mid-week Bulletin Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October

**Night Prayer:** tonight at 8pm

[https://www.facebook.com/pg/vicaragecello1/videos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/vicaragecello1/videos/?ref=page_internal)

**Sunday Eucharist:** 10 am in St Arvans Church.

Please note that **FACEMASKS MUST BE WORN.**

You must book your place every time you would like to come

Please post a Comment on this website if you wish to attend and do not receive our local Newsletter, direct. We will get back to you as soon as we are able to.

### St Arvans online

Find our live service stream at: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/vicaragecello1/videos/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/vicaragecello1/videos/?ref=page_internal)

**Sunday Morning Eucharist** will be broadcast live at **10am**

**Wednesday evening:** Night Prayer will be broadcast live at **8 pm**

Please send any contributions to this bulletin to [starvanschurchnews@btinternet.com](mailto:starvanschurchnews@btinternet.com)

Please share it with others whom you think will be interested, and invite them to contact us if they want to go on the mailing list at: [starvanschurchnews@btinternet.com](mailto:starvanschurchnews@btinternet.com)

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### Prayer and meditation

*This week we are reproducing, with his kind permission, a sermon preached on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September by the Dean of St Albans, the Very Reverend Dr Jeffrey John. He is speaking about that week's two readings – one from the Book of Jonah (3.10 – 4.11) and one from the Gospel of St Matthew (20: 1-16). The reading reports how Jonah was angry at God for pardoning the sinners in Nineveh; the gospel was of the labourers in the vineyard, who were all paid the same rate, regardless of how long they had worked.*

### Jonah and the Labourers in the Vineyard

Today's first reading is the ending of the book of Jonah. Everybody thinks they know about Jonah because they remember the whale. But it's the ending that's important, not the whale. According to the book, Jonah lived in the eighth century BC, when Israel was overrun by the Assyrians. The Assyrians were not very nice. Even in ancient times they were notoriously barbaric. One of the things they were famous for was castrating their male prisoners of war - which was a very effective way of discouraging opposition. So when God orders Jonah to go

to the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, to tell them to repent, Jonah felt that on the whole he'd rather not. So, to escape God, as well as the Assyrians, he takes a boat in the opposite direction, to Tarshish.

You remember what happens next. There's a big storm, the ship won't move, and the sailors discover Jonah is the culprit. So they chuck him overboard and he's swallowed by the whale. Three days later the whale burps Jonah up on a beach, and lo and behold, it's Nineveh. 'There you are', says God to Jonah. 'Now then, would you like just to pop into Nineveh and do what I told you to do in the first place?' So Jonah gives up and goes, probably wincing in anticipation. But he does his stuff. He wanders around the streets of Nineveh telling the people that they have been very naughty indeed. God wants them to stop being beastly and chopping people's bits off, and to say sorry for what they've done. And if they don't listen God will destroy the city and wipe them out.

Incredibly, according to the book, they did listen. "Oh dear", say the Assyrians. "You're right. We haven't been very nice have we? Sorry!" And from the king down, all the Assyrians put on sackcloth and ashes and beg the God of Israel for forgiveness. So God relents, and he cancels his threat to destroy Nineveh, because they repented.

You might think that would be the end of the story, but no, now comes the important bit. Jonah gets furiously angry, as we heard in the reading. 'Look God' he says, 'I've risked life and limb for you, coming to these barbarians. They've been massacring us Jews for years. The least you could have done was give me the satisfaction of wiping them out, even if it was just a small earthquake or something. But no; just because they've said sorry you've let them off. Call yourself a God of justice!'

So Jonah goes off in a tremendous huff to sit and sulk in the desert. To help him out, God makes a tree grow so at least he has some shade. But he still sits and sulks. So God tries another tactic. He strikes the tree dead. And that does it. Jonah gets into a huge rage and says to God, "Well that's typical! First you give me a tree, then you strike it dead. You give with one hand and take with the other. I am so angry I am going to DIE! So there!" Then God says, very patiently, "Look Jonah. First you are angry because I forgave the Ninevites. Then you are angry because I kill a tree. What's more important, a tree or a city of 120,000 people? Here are all these people, whom I made in my image, but you want them wiped out. Are you really so angry, just because I am kinder than you are?" And there the story ends. Jonah has to learn that God's love is far bigger than he imagined. Even these barbarian Gentiles who were persecuting Israel are still human beings who can do the right thing, if they are given a chance. In the end it's Jonah who is in the wrong for refusing to accept how generous God is.

And that is the whole point of the book. The story of Jonah is of course not history. It wasn't written in the eighth century BC, it was written four centuries later, after the Jews returned from Babylon. It was a time when Jerusalem and Judaism were being rebuilt under Ezra and Nehemiah, but along very narrow and exclusive lines. Basically their policy was ethnic cleansing. They drove out all Gentiles or mixed race Jews, they forbade Jews to marry Gentiles and made them divorce if they had married. The author of Jonah saw this happening and hated it. He was a liberal Jew who hated seeing his religion being made so narrow and prejudiced about non-Jews. So he wrote this story to hold up a mirror to his fellow Jews and show them their reflection. 'Look', he is saying, 'you think that because God chose you you're superior and that you've got a monopoly on God. Well think again. God cares about everybody, not just you'.

Today's Gospel is actually saying the same thing. Originally the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard was also about Jews and Gentiles. Matthew wrote his Gospel for an ethnically Jewish church. They were Jews who had accepted that Jesus was the Messiah, but they still had great doubts about whether Gentiles should be included in the church, especially if they didn't keep the whole Law. So Matthew includes this story to try and persuade them. Like the labourers who worked all day, the Jews in Matthew's church were saying, 'Why should these blasted Gentiles, who have persecuted us for centuries, suddenly be accepted as God's people too? After all we have put up with, why should they get in at the eleventh hour?

God's answer to them is the same as he gave to Jonah. 'What have you got to grumble about? You've got what you were promised. Why are you envious because I am generous?' So.... originally both today's readings were about Jews resenting Gentiles. But of course they apply much more widely than that; they apply to us all. In the punchline of the parable, when the master asks the grumbling labourers, 'Why are you envious because I am generous?' what he actually says in Greek is: 'Why is your eye evil because I am good?' The grumblers have 'the evil eye'. And the truth is, we all get the evil eye sometimes, usually when somebody else gets something we think we deserve more.

Gore Vidal once confessed 'Whenever a friend succeeds, a little something in me dies' – which describes the evil eye very well. It is not just jealousy, it is a sense of outraged entitlement. It's the child inside us shouting 'It's not fair!' 'Why does she get all the attention? How come they get paid more? How did that moron get promoted?'...

I get the evil eye every time I look at a bishop...

And when it happens, the only answer is to realise that we are Jonah, we are the grumbling labourers - and we need to remember what God thinks about it. Which is: Stop whingeing. Stop begrudging other people's blessings, and start counting your own. Why should you be envious because I am generous?

Why indeed?

Amen.

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## Music

This week's hymn is Jesus Lover of my Soul. Sung to the tune Aberystwyth, by the Morrision Orpheus Choir – I do love a male voice choir !!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cqlsYFIAuU>

I defy anyone to listen to this without smiling and tapping your feet! The Soweto Gospel Choir sing "This little light of mine"

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yUK0S\\_cEXY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yUK0S_cEXY)

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## On the lighter side

Some more of the ever-popular Church bulletin bloopers this week:

We are delighted to announce that the youth group has raised almost £500 for drug abuse.

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Correction: The following typo appeared in our last bulletin: 'Lunch will be gin at 12:15.' Please correct to read '12 noon.'

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Any church member over 18 is welcome on our new lay ministry programme. It requires minimal training and time: just six weekly classes of about 200 hours each Tuesday night.

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The Seniors group will have a picnic on Saturday. Each person is asked to bring a friend, a vegetable, and a sweet, all in a covered dish.

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Remember the church jumble sale. We have a gents three-speed bicycle, also two ladies for sale, in good running order.

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We are pleased to note that there has been a change of mind by the Housing Department regarding the name for the new Housing complex for the elderly. 'St Peter's Close' did seem somewhat inappropriate.

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**St Arvans Church is open for Sunday Eucharist this Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> October, at 10am.**

Places must be reserved in advance