The Church Called

31 Devotions on The Book of Jonah

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Introduction

We are all aware that the story of Jonah as recorded in the Bible is a true story of an account that took place in history and one that cannot be disputed. But what I'd like to do in these 31 devotions, is compare the story of Jonah as recorded in the book of Jonah, with The Church at-large, and see what learnings we can glean from it – hence the name, *'The Church called Jonah.'*

Who is not familiar with the story of Jonah. It's been taught right from childhood in every Sunday School across the globe. But it's usually told in a way that is meant to entertain children, to the extent, it's even taken on a very fable-like feel, with may even decrying the authenticity of the story. With this approach, it's not often meditated upon by adults and therefore we forfeit learning the things we can from it. I hope you are blessed by these devotions in a way that transforms the way you live out and share the Gospel of Jesus with the world around you.

There are a total of 31 topics, each of which could serve as a daily devotion.

1 - The First Commission

Jonah 1:1,2-*"Now the Word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.'"*

These opening words of the book of Jonah remind me of the closing words of the book of Matthew, where Jesus commissions His disciples, before He ascends into Heaven with these words, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen."

Comparison of the Commissioned
In the story of Jonah, the First Commission was given by God to one man, Jonah, while, while the Great Commission, was given by God's Son Jesus, to His disciples, the pillars of The Church. Every one of us who belong to the body of Christ are called to fulfil this Commission while we sojourn here on earth. We're not supposed to do it out of compulsion, or for personal gain, but out of a passion to see lives transformed by the love and power of God.

Comparison of the Time and the Place
The Commission to Jonah was concerning a time several centuries ago concerning one great city called Nineveh, whereas the Great Commission was given to The Church concerning people across the globe, beginning with those who lived at the time, and right until the Lord's Return.

Comparison of the Messages
In the story of Jonah, God asked Jonah to proclaim a message of judgment to the city of Nineveh, as their evil deeds that had come up before Him. In the Great Commission The Church is commissioned to make disciples of all nations, which includes calling people to repentance and faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. It's an invitation to accept the gift of Salvation, which is free for us, though it cost Jesus His very life. Our message, though an invitation, also contains a warning to both those who reject the Gospel and to those who don't live out their faith on a daily basis.

Comparison of Purposes
God gave Jonah a purpose for that particular period in his life, and that was to be the His mouthpiece to the people of Nineveh. It was a very clear purpose and there was no doubt in Jonah's mind that this was a God-ordained purpose for his life. If each of us in The Church are to ponder the purpose of our lives, very often we'll find ourselves drawing up a blank because many of us haven't taken the time to discover our purpose in life yet. But in the Great commission, the purpose of The Church was spelled out in clear terms. The Lord has given every one of us in The Church, a life-long purpose – one that encompasses all areas of our lives, including our time, money and energy. We are called to carry the Gospel message wherever we go, and into every sphere of society. We are called to be witnesses to the world, of Jesus' saving grace and to intentionally make disciples of people of all nations. But this message needs to be shared in love and not with an attitude of accusation or condemnation.

So to put our life's purpose in perspective, we can say that each of us in The Church have been called to love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength, to love

our neighbour as ourselves, and in this attitude of love to take the Gospel to all the world, beginning right where we are in our circles of influence.

The Big Question

Let's pause for a moment and answer this question. Are we fulfilling our life's purpose? Or are we sailing along life aimlessly? Alternately, are we striving to achieve things that the world is chasing after? Both these attitudes decry the work of Jesus on the cross on our behalf, and nullify it in our lives, thereby causing our lives to be both unfruitful and a never-ending pursuit of nothingness.

The Response

If we are fulfilling our life's purpose by lovingly serving the Lord wherever He has placed us, then let's continue, full steam ahead, but if the answer is either, "No," or "Not sure," then it's time to repent and ask the Lord for a fresh revelation of Himself, so we can embark on this journey of both knowing Him and making Him known to the world around. The Lord is more than willing to receive us back to Himself with open arms, if only we'll return to Him wholeheartedly.

2 - The Rebellion

Jonah 1:3a - *"But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord..."*

1**. BUT**
In verse 1, God clearly told Jonah to go and preach against Nineveh as it's wickedness had come up before God. Verse 2 begins with the word, *'But.'* The verse could have begun with the word, *'So,'* but it didn't. The word, 'So' would have meant that he decided to obey the Lord and go to Nineveh. By the verse beginning with the word, *'But,'* we immediately get a sense that something's amiss. It creates in us a sense of curiosity, as to where this story could be going.

Rebellion seems to be wrapped up in the heart of man and is evident in us humans, right from our childhood. It began in the Garden of Eden and it hasn't changed since. It's almost like something comes alive inside of us when we hear an instruction to do something, and we immediately question it, and even before we have a reason to disobey, we decide to do so. Once we decide to rebel, it's easy to create reasons for the rebellion. Jonah was only doing what most of us do best, and in his case too, he had a reason for it and we'll look at that in another devotion.

It's the same with the Church today. We the church have been commissioned to make disciples of all nations, and though the early church began really well by making disciples of all nations, over time, gradually and steadily, the church rebelled against this commission by Jesus to disciple the world and we've become comfortable with merely making converts and celebrating the birth of new believer, as if it were the end. In fact it's really just the beginning of their journey with the Lord, which, without help, they would find it difficult to undertake.

We're all supposed to be making disciples, but (note the word *'but')* a large percentage of the church has relinquished that personal responsibility and palmed it off to a very small percentage The Church. Paul, the apostle refers to these leaders in **Ephesians 4:11** as Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers. What's even stranger, is that these five categories of leaders were actually supposed to equip, train and release the 95% to do the work, but they've ended up doing it all and most of the others have taken a back seat. Little wonder the church is on the decline in several countries and many church buildings have even been converted into anything but places where the people of God can gather together. It's that small word 'but' that makes all the difference between the world being saved or lost.

2. **Jonah Arose**
By the words, "Jonah arose," it appears that Jonah was not in a standing position. We don't know the position he was in, but we do know that he arose. The words 'Jonah arose' adds to the suspense of his impending course of action, a glimpse of which we've already seen through the word, 'But.' It's obvious that his course of action is most probably going to be resistive and rebellious. We now want to know what he decides to do.

Whenever we, the Church sit in the presence of the Lord at home, church or elsewhere, and He speaks to us through His Word or directly through His Spirit, and we are convicted, corrected, envisioned, instructed or directed, in time we arise, but the question is, What do we do when we arise? Do we continue to do what we've always done as if nothing just happened and make the Lord's voice to us of no effect, or do we arise to walk in obedience to Him? What we arise to do makes all the difference between us fulfilling God's will (desire) in our lives or not. Let's decide to arise to obedience.

During this Global Pandemic, the Lord is speaking to all of us in no uncertain terms, but the question remains whether we are listening enough to hear what He's saying to each of us and to all of us. And then, are we willing to arise to do what we're told or reminded to do? The Church will certainly come out of this crisis, but how we respond to the voice of God during this time of crisis, will determine how we come out of it – better or bitter, stronger or weaker, overcomers or defeated, refined or polluted., envisioned or not. That outcome is in more ways than one is in our hands.

3**. To Flee**
Jonah didn't just arise, he arose to flee. It's amazing the energy, enthusiasm and determination we work up when we don't want to do something as opposed to when we want to. There seems to be an extra adrenalin rush when it's connected with rebellion than when it's connected with obedience. The word, 'flee,' gives us the impression of a movement that's faster than walking or running – it was a quick escape from the scene of the conversation with God. In today's world, that word would mean taking a flight to go someplace far away from where one's being asked to go.

How's our response to the Great Commission going? Are we slowly meandering towards the goal of making disciples, are we running with all our strength with that purpose in mind or are we fleeing away from it with all the energy we can muster? Going by the global Christianity statistics, it's quite obvious that not all of us are fleeing in the direction of making disciples – some are, but most aren't. If we were all moving in the direction the Lord commissioned us to, our world would have been reached and discipled centuries ago. Let's decide to walk in the direction laid out for us and not flee in any other direction. We'll see why not in later devotions.

4. **To Tarshish**
It's not entirely clear where Tarshish was – some believe it was at the tip of present day Spain, while Josephus believed that it was another name for Tarsus, where the apostle Paul (initially known as Saul) hailed from. But wherever the place was, one thing is evident – it was not the place the Lord was sending Jonah.

I wonder which place we, The Church have set our sights on to get away from fulfilling The Great Commission. What's our Tarshish? Is it a geographical location? Is it a profession? Is it a skill? Is it am ambition? Whatever it is, one thing is clear, it's not where the Lord commissioned us to go. The Lord asked us to go into all the world to make disciples of all nations, but the question is, Where are we going and why?

5**. From the Presence of the Lord**
The thought of fleeing from the Presence of the Lord seems absurd to one who knows that God is omnipresent. Did Jonah not know that fact about God, or did he think that the place he was headed to, was one that God would not want to be present in for some reason? In **Psalm 139:7-12,** the Psalmist David says, *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You."* But whatever Jonah's understanding of God was, he set out on his journey of fleeing from the presence of the Lord.

Have we, The Church, sought to flee from the presence of the Lord, so as to cease from hearing His voice reminding us that the reason we were saved was serve the Lord by making disciples of all nations? If that's the case, let's remind ourselves that we are on a futile pursuit - as we'll discover later on in this story.

You will arise after reading this devotion, to do what you do daily– whether it's continuing on in the privileged responsibility of making disciples of all nations or you will arise to do anything but what the Lord has reminded you to do. If you're going to go about the former, then arise and go full steam ahead and do just that, right till the end, for your labour will not be in vain. But if it's your intention to arise to do anything else but that, may I encourage you, to stop right now and ask the Lord to help you get a grasp on His purpose for saving you. And then, when you're convinced that you were saved to serve, arise to do nothing but that and trust me, your labour will be richly rewarded both here and in eternity.

3 – The Voyage

Jonah 1:3b - "He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord."

He went down to Joppa

We've seen how Jonah made up his mind to 'flee from the presence of the Lord,' It isn't long before a rebellious attitude is followed by a rebellious act, and that's what Jonah did. He was told to go to Nineveh (which was in the east), but he decided to go west to Tarshish instead. He headed Joppa, which was his connecting point, from where he would then board a ship to Tarshish. In all my years of travels (with my mother and brothers before marriage), when we traveled across India for no particular reason, I remember the many connecting points we touched to get to where we were going.

We know from **2 Kings 14:25** that Jonah hailed from Gath Hepher, which is present day Mashhad, which is at an altitude of 985 metres (3250 feet). We don't know where Jonah was when the Lord spoke with him, but if he was in his home town of Gath Hepher, then when it says that 'He went down to Joppa,' it literally meant that he traveled 'down' to Joppa. Isn't it amazing the extent one would go to not do something as opposed to doing something? It's amazing that though it takes a lot less effort to obey God, than it does to disobey Him, so often we find ourselves expending our efforts on the former rather than the latter. To be a voice for the Lord is a lot less difficult than it is to run away from that call.

Joppa was his connecting point to Tarshish. What are the connecting points for us The Church of today? Are the connecting points in our lives the people and places that help us fulfil God's call on our lives? Or are our connecting points cities, people, our jobs our positions etc. that serve as stepping stones to get us as far away from the Lord's will for our lives as possible?

And found a ship going to Tarshish

Jonah wanted to go to Tarshish one of the farthest possible places west at the time (as the Americas had not yet been discovered). Tarshish, would have been near present day Gibraltar in Spain. So Jonah was planning a trip from the east end of the Mediterranean Sea to the west of it. When Tarshish was Jonah's goal, all he needed was the transportation to get him there and find it he did. The quickest way to get to Tarshish would have been by ship as there weren't planes back then. One can imagine the joy of finding a ship headed to your choice destination, even though you may be running away from God's plan for your life. It might even seem like a divine provision.

Have we found the 'vehicle' that would help us accomplish the Lord's call on our lives or are we searching for one to get as far away from it as possible?

So he paid the fare

Jonah had made up his mind about his mission and his destination; he had found the mode of transport to get him there and there was nothing that would stand in his way of achieving his goal. He was willing to pay whatever it was to get him there. He purchased his ticket and was now on his way.

Isn't it amazing how often, when we The Church of today are on a mission to take the gospel to our neighbour, be it a person, city or country, that we look for the smallest possible obstacle to not do it, explaining it away as not being the Lord's will or timing or both? On the other hand, when we pursue self-centred goals, how willing we are to pay whatever the price to ensure we have a seat on the 'vehicle' to get where we want? At such times, nothing stands in our way, and God's will and timing seem to be 'just right.'

Are we doing all we can to let the Lord use us to fulfil His purpose for creating, calling and choosing us - namely reach and disciple the world, or are we paying our way away to move as far away from it as possible?

And went down into it

Jonah didn't just board the ship, but he actually seemed to have picked his spot on the ship – 'down into it.' We'll see why he chose that spot in another devotion. Jonah was smart in that he knew which was the most stable part of the ship, and he chose that part of the ship.

Many of us in The Church of today have taken a rather comfortable seat on our journey through life – one that's non-controversial, more and more inclusive of ungodly lifestyles, less and less firm in our stand for Godly values and living and we're sailing along in the ocean of life.

Have we 'gone down' to a comfortable place so we can enjoy the journey with none but ourselves in mind, or are we busy with the work of the Lord, namely saving those who are sailing along aimlessly in life, searching desperately for what we have taken so for granted?

To go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord

Jonah had set out on a journey along with other people who were bound for Tarshish, but while they were going about their everyday business, Jonah was merely blending in with the crowd and could easily have passed off as just another businessman going about his travels. What a comfortable place to be when we blend in with others, to the extent that they don't see the difference between our life's purpose and theirs, our lifestyle and theirs, our values and priorities and theirs.

All were on the same boat, but not all were headed to the same destination in a sense. While the crew and the other passengers were headed to Tarshish, Jonah was headed elsewhere - *'away from the presence of the Lord.'*

Many of us in The Church of today have done an excellent job of blending in with the world to such an extent that not only have they not got to see what we're about, but we ourselves have forgotten the mission we're on, a long time back. We're sailing along to our own 'Tarshishes,' hoping the Lord isn't going to catch up with us to remind us of our mission here on earth. We've become so comfortable with purposeless living, that we can now teach the world around how to live without a purpose and to simply sail along.

Are we *'blending in'* with the world or *'standing out'* for the Lord, with the goal of bringing in those who are out? Are we seeking to be about the Lord's business or about our own? If we're about the Lord's *'business,'* then we're in a safe place, but if we're about our own *'business,'* then it's time to stop, take stock, repent and get back on track going about what we were saved to do - save souls by making disciples.

4 - The Mighty Tempest

Jonah 1:4 - *"But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up."*

But the Lord sent out a Great Wind on the Sea
Jonah had just boarded a ship to Tarshish and was doing a good job of blending with the other travelers, as if nothing was amiss in his life – after all, who knows our thoughts and intentions but God, and we ourselves. And if God doesn't reveal them to other people, we're safe isn't it? He had found himself a comfortable place on the ship – at the bottom of it, and settled in for the journey.

Just when Jonah perhaps thought all was well, and taken care of, did the Lord enter the scene again. **Verse 4** says, *"But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea.."* Jonah didn't seem to take into account a couple of important things; one was that He couldn't out run God, who was omnipresent, and the other was that, when God wanted to do something, no one, and nothing could stop Him.

The Lord did something that neither Jonah, nor the ship crew had foreseen. He sent out a great wind on the sea. Jonah didn't realise that he was up against the God of the universe, and that there was no way he could ever win against Him. This was no regular tempest that came upon the Mediterranean Sea at that time of the year – it was sent by God Himself. Jonah didn't realise that the Lord who had created the winds and the waves could do anything He wanted, whenever He wanted, for whatever reason He wanted, and for as long as He wanted.

As The Church of today, have some of us forgotten our life's calling, and are we sailing along with the rest of the world? Have we forgotten that we are supposed to be about God's work on the earth? Have we forgotten that the Great Commission was given not only to the disciples, but to every believer who is also a disciple (follower) of the Lord Jesus? Have some of us become rather comfortable running away from the Lord's call on our lives? The Lord is able to send a *'great wind'* to rock our life's *'ship.'*

We've heard the words of Paul in **Romans 8:31**, which says, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* But let's also remember that if the Lord is against us, it doesn't matter who is for us or with us - it won't make a difference - we'll be fighting a losing battle. In this case, it seemed like the Lord was against Jonah - not to harm him, but to bring him back to God's call on his life's purpose.

That's the same way the Lord works in our individual lives, as well as in the life of The Church at large. He will do all it takes to enable us His Body to get in sync with the Head – Jesus. He will do all He can to bring us onto the journey of fulfilling the reason why He saved us from the clutches of sin and death - to help get others saved.

And there was a Great Tempest on the Sea
The 'great wind' that God sent, caused a 'mighty tempest' on the sea. When God struck, He struck the sea - the thing that the ship depended on to make it's journey. Suddenly, the ship's stability was literally thrown to the winds, and the ship was in danger of being broken up. It's hard for a large ship to move through a tempestuous sea in our present day. One can imagine how a ship back in the day would have been affected by the 'great tempest' caused by the 'great wind,' sent by God Himself.

The world is going through a 'great tempest' called COVID-19. We can actually coin a new word for it - tempest-illence because it's a Tempestuous Pestilence that's wreaking havoc across the globe, including in The Church. To a large extent, it's hindering us form accomplishing what we're supposed to be about - making disciple of all nations. I see this tempest-illence as a way of the Lord directing the attention of us The Church back to Him, His will and His plan in and through us across the globe.

The Ship was about to be Broken up

Suddenly the mode of transportation that Jonah had chosen (and also paid for), was in danger of being destroyed. Ships are not built to be destroyed by tempests, but such must have been the fury of this tempest, that the ship was in danger of being destroyed by it. The means he had chosen to run away from God was no longer a safe haven for him. He seemed to have paid for his ticket to death.

As The Church of today, are we in a situation where the 'ships' we have boarded to get away from the Lord's call to make disciples, are in danger of being 'broken up?' Are we finding ourselves in similar situations to Jonah, where we've actually purchased tickets for journeys that seem to be heading nowhere but to destruction? Is this tempest-illence destroying the comfort zones we paid for?

It's important that we as The Church stop and reflect on our lives during this crisis and ask whether this tempest-illence is an act of God to stop us in our tracks of selfish ambition that we were supposed to be saved from in the first place. Is the earth beneath us giving way, as it were? Is our confidence in things crumbling and giving way to fear and anxiety? If not, great – let's continue on in this God-initiated journey of knowing the Lord and making Him known. But if the answer is, "Yes, our confidence is crumbling and giving way to fear and anxiety," then it's not too late to stop and change the direction we're headed in, knowing that the Lord is gracious, merciful and willing to forgive us and receive us back to Himself. He will, in fact, assist us on the journey of making disciples of all nations. The choice, as always, is up to us – let's be wise and act accordingly today.

5 - The Fearful Mariners

Jonah 1:5 - *"Then the mariners were afraid…"*

The Mariners…
When the ship is about to be broken up, then the crew know that they are in real danger. They are not only in danger of losing their ship, but also in danger of losing their lives. They must have been experienced sailors and accustomed to the ship, to the sea and to storms, but this one seemed boisterous enough to instil fear in them. The ones who were entrusted to see the passengers (and Jonah) arrive safely at Tarshish were now not so sure they would make the journey. That's not a good feeling to have as a passenger. It's like a ship captain was shouting, "Mayday."

A Trust Issue
Jonah had entrusted his life into the hands of men whom he did not know and was on a journey fleeing away from the God he did know. Now, these men he had entrusted his life to, who thought they had their ship under control were suddenly not in control anymore. The sailors who had trusted the ship to get them from Joppa to Tarshish were on the verge of losing faith in their ship. Suddenly all that was trusted in was letting everyone down and that's not a good place to be in. Suddenly all controls that the ship had were of no avail. It seemed like their trust had been betrayed as it were. When the ground beneath you gives way, what are you left to stand on?

Were Afraid…
When sailors are afraid, then there's real danger. The storm was in control of not just their ship but also of their emotions now. Sailors are tough men, but for fear to grip their hearts means it's no ordinary fear of phobia we're talking about – we're talking about serious danger. When fear sets in, it can affect logical reasoning, it can cripple the person, it can cause a great deal of stress, it can result in other emotions like anger and anxiety. It can result in bad decision-making. There's no telling what can happen when fear grips one's heart. It's not an emotion any passenger likes to see in the face of their ship crew. In fact, it's not an emotion a sailor expects to experience on a journey he's made so many times.

Team Fear
We're not talking about one sailor here, there was obviously a crew of them that were in charge of the ship. For one person to be afraid is one thing, but for all the sailors to be afraid is something to not take lightly. One person could be having an emotional issue, but all of them can't be having the same problem at the same time and for the same reason, unless it's a real and serious problem.

In whose hands have we entrusted our lives?
Just like Jonah entrusted his life into the hands of the sailors who did not know God or what He was about in the world, so also many of us have entrusted our lives into the care of men who neither know God, nor what He is about in the world – saving mankind from a lost eternity. Jonah was on a journey fleeing from God's call on His life and from the presence of God - or so he thought. Many of us in The Church are in the same 'boat,' (pun intended). Who are the 'mariners' in whose hands we The Church have so gladly entrusted our lives as we 'sail along' in life? This might seem like an odd question. After all, The Church is in God's hands right? And nothing can destroy it. While that's absolutely true, the question remains, how many of us have placed our lives in the Lord's hands. It takes each of us trusting God to make all of us

trusting God. And if most of us are trusting in the things of the world to see us through in life - money, education, position, appearance, skill, power, influence, fame, etc, then let's not kid ourselves - we've entrusted our lives into the hands of the world, not into the hands of The Lord. There's nothing wrong with any of the above per se, but trusting in any of these things to see us through life and beyond, is the problem, and sadly, many of us have not only done just that, but we're doing all we can to train our children to do so to the best of their ability. They are not to blame for that – we are.

Who stands to lose?
The call to make disciples of the world was not only for the 12 disciples but to every believer in Christ. Not all of us were called into full-time ministry as they were, though some of us were very specifically called. But all of us are called to be full-time witnesses of God's work in our lives and have the responsibility to share the gospel with the world and to make disciples of them. There's no way around that – it's the very reason we were kept back on earth after we got saved – to help save others. We were ready for heaven the moment we got saved but if all of us went home immediately then how would the others get to know God? That's how serious our calling is – let's not take it lightly.

When we are too busy going about our own affairs and being unconcerned with God's purposes through us - purposes that would affect the lives of countless millions across the globe both positively and eternally, then we are jeopardising their lives for eternity. We can't afford to have this lackadaisical attitude towards God's call, and towards the people Jesus died and rose to save. Such an attitude will eventually impact our own lives forever – unless we repent and return to God's call on our lives.

Who's Afraid?
We're going through a pandemic, the likes of which none of us alive have ever seen – we've only read about them in the past. Not only is it's effects lethal, but it's reach is also global – every conceivable country and territory has been both infected and affected. There's hardly a human who has not, in some way been affected by this Virus called COVID-19. It seems to spread it's tentacles across, not only racial lines, but also professional, political, religious, language and cultural lines as well – it's a respecter of no one. There are many national leaders who are in a state of confusion, not knowing what to do – whatever course of action is taken could have ill effects one way or the other – much like our sailors who were afraid and at a loss as to what to do during the tempest-illence.

Who's our Support?
Whom are we, The Church depending on at this time? Those of us who have always sought God are still seeking Him, while those of us who have not sought Him, are leaning heavily on our leaders to see us through this crisis, but sadly, their hands are tied – there's nothing they can do, because it seems that the hand of the Lord is against the world at the moment and the best thing one can do at this time is to repent and turn to God with all our hearts.

The Call
If you've never really been saved and known God (not known about God), and don't have a personal, intimate relationship with Him, then there's no better time than now to repent and turn to God. If you've known Him but walked away from His call on your life to do your own thing, then it's time to stop in your tracks and repent all over again and get back to fulfilling God's plan in and through your life. Tomorrow may be too late. There's a world out there waiting for every individual in the Body of Christ to get up and begin sharing the Love and

Gospel with them like never before, and I believe that they are open to believe now, more than they've ever been in the past. Let's not lose this amazing opportunity to connect with them and lead them to their loving Creator, who's waiting to welcome them home. It's about time we got busy doing what we were saved to do – help save the world from a lost eternity.

6 – The Great Cry

Jonah 1:5 – *"every man cried out to his god."*

We've just seen how the mariners, who obviously would have been tough men and who would have weathered many a storm, were so afraid because of the tempest. Now we're going to look at how they went beyond just experiencing the emotion of fear but see how they expressed their fear and what they did as a result.

As is wont of every human being, when we experience fear, most of us do something as a result. When difficult circumstances are under our control, we do all we can to overcome the situation as smoothly and as quickly as possible, but there are times when things are beyond our control. At that point of our lives, most humans would cry out to God, who has control over all things. As is the case today, so it was in the days of Jonah, the sailors decided to cry out, each man to his god.

When fear is experienced by an entire team, then every member of the team ensures they do something about it and they don't just leave it to the *'Captain,'* whoever that might be. That's great team work actually. When an entire team is in a crisis, we can't simply pretend all's well and leave the decision making to the leaders, while we take a back seat, hoping things will turn out well. In such situations, each of us needs to share the responsibility and do all we can to help carry the load together.

1. Every Man

It says, *"Every man,"* meaning, every mariner decided to do something about the situation. They had done all they could as a team, now it was time to do all they could individually. It's almost always true that when a team is attacked, there'll come a time when the team no longer matters and one's own life is all that matters. There are exceptions to this though. There are teams like the police, soldiers, sportsmen, etc., for whom being a team means sticking together no matter what.

- **No other option**

Remember the disciples of Jesus? When Jesus was being arrested, almost all of them dispersed and deserted Jesus at His most difficult moment. So also, at this time, suddenly, each man was taking on a responsibility to help calm the situation as a team, but perhaps also because each of their lives were at stake. Perhaps if there was a life-threatening situation on land, each man would have fled as far and as fast as he could, but since they were in the sea, with swimming against such huge waves not being a plausible option, and with nowhere else to go, they decided to stay in the ship.

- **We Are One**

In The Church too, it's not often that we realise that we are actually One Family, One Kingdom, One Body, One Church, One Nation, One Building, etc. We tend to think of ourselves as individuals, who are loosely connected with The Church, or completely disconnected from one another, when the Bible teaches us otherwise. That's why when trouble comes, it becomes so easy to distance ourselves from one another in The Church. The quicker we realise the fact of our oneness, will be begin to work towards living out this unity in the Body of Christ, and the quicker we'll become a people the world will begin to recognise as belonging to Christ, as was Jesus prayer in **John 17**, where He prayed that all of us would be One, just as He and the Father were one, so that the world would know that the Father sent The Son. We need to stop living

and functioning as individuals that don't belong to The Church of God on the earth and start consciously working together, along with the Body of Christ – locally, nationally and globally. It's only when that unity starts to play out in The Church across the globe that the world will stop, take note and stream into The Church.

2. **Cried out**

The words, *"cried out,"* has also been translated as *"shouted out"* in some versions. Whether it was *'crying out'* or *'shouting out,'* it's not a very common thing in many a culture for a man to shout out or cry out in fear - it's usually seen as a sign of weakness. Given the location of our story – the Middle-East, it would also suggest a similar culture where men don't cry out or shout out in fear – unless of course, they were in intense danger. This means that the situation must have been really grim and beyond all hope that they *"cried out."* They were calling on their gods for help. When one is crying out to God, one's gender, social protocol, and any other stereotypes that might describe them are thrown to the winds and one realises that he is crying out for help to someone far bigger than himself. At that point, one's life is more important than anything else – much less, people's opinions and societal norms.

- **Men are crying out today**

There's a world of men crying out today – may not be literally, but figuratively. They are crying out for attention, for prominence, for popularity, for power and the like. Sadly, such men are not crying out to God, but to the world around them to provide us with those things. They are searching for these things to give them a sense of identity, purpose and meaning, and the more they cry out, the more the farther they seem to be from achieving their goals, and the farther they are, the louder the cries and sadly, when the shouting deafens their own ears, many of them call it a day and end their lives in desperation. This need not be the case – men can call out to God and God will hear, answer and give them the sense of identity, purpose and meaning far greater than they anticipated.

- **More Christian Fathers Please**

Not only does the world need to cry out to God, but there's a huge need for Christian fathers to do so too. It's been proved beyond doubt that many of the problems that children face today stem from the absent father. A father who doesn't play his role as a father, by being with his children, providing love and affection, being a pillar of security in the home, is doing his children a big disfavour (even if he is taking care of the financial needs of the home), and his kids will grow up searching for the things he was meant to provide them with, and often than not, they go astray and many don't find their way back to the fold. It's never a weak thing to call out to God – no matter who we are. If you've never called out to God, do so today – He's willing to answer you and make a transformation in your life like you could never have imagined.

- **No outsourcing please**

The Sunday School is under pressure to deliver *'goods'* it cannot *'produce.'* Let me explain. Children were entrusted to parents by God Himself, to bring them up to know and love God and live for Him, but just as we have outsourced children's education, and other activities, we have gradually and steadily outsourced this responsibility to reach and disciple our own children to the Sunday School in the Church. Of the 168 hours in a week, children attend Sunday School for 1-2 hour only, and within that time, they are expected to be transformed into mature Christian believers. And if that doesn't happen, then the entire blame is thrown on the Sunday School. That is both an impractical and illogical expectation by parents on the

Sunday School Team. How can we entrust our children to someone else to introduce them to the One who gave them to us in the first place? Is that not our responsibility?

- **The Christian Father**

Of the vast number of families that have not outsourced this responsibility to Sunday School in the church, another sad fact is that the responsibility to bring children up to know God personally has been delegated to the mothers, who already have their hands full with full-time jobs and bringing up the children, (as if that was their role alone). I've know what it is to not have a dad in my growing years, let alone the luxury of a good Christian father. Let us Christian Fathers rise up and take on the responsibility of being the role models of Christian living in the home. Good Christian fathers result in boys becoming good husbands and fathers later on in life. They also result in the daughters making wise choices when choosing their husband. Consciously or unconsciously, girls tend to choose a man similar to their fathers, so let's decide that we will be the best possible father we can be to our children.

3. **To his god**

The mariners were so filled with fear that they began to cry out, every man to his god. It's obvious from this statement that the men worshipped several gods and not the one God of the Universe, else the statement would have read, *"Every man cried out to God."* Just like people have pets in their homes, many a home has their own gods whom they submit their entire lives to. Paul refers to such people who create their own gods in **Romans 1:16-32**, when he talks about men rejecting the Creator and worshipping His creation and suffering the consequences thereof. While it is sad and tragic that men would cry out to figments of their imagination – to creations of their fantasy and call them gods, there go we, but for the grace of God, who made Himself known to us personally.

We live in a world that is so pluralistic that it's hard for a true seeker to find the truth these days. That's one solid reason why, we who know the truth, need to share it with those who don't. We're seeing a lot more openness to the truth during this COVID-19 Pandemic than ever before, and we need to do all we can to proclaim the truth in love while we have the open door.

May the God we've come to know be so evident in our lives that those who hold on to other gods will see the difference in our lives and come to know The Way to God (Jesus) through us.

7 - The Disposing

Jonah 1:5 – *"every man cried out to his god and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load."*

And threw the cargo…
We just saw how the mariners, each cried out to his god to help them out of the terrible situation they were in. Now we see them going one step further.

- **No other gods but One**

Notice it says that "every man cried out to his god and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea." It looks like they did both things at the same time – they cried out and threw the cargo into the sea. It doesn't seem like they prayed to their gods and waited to see if they would come to their rescue before they decided to do something about it themselves.
For those who don't know the Lord personally, and for those who worship other gods, there's no way they can have a testimony of their 'gods' intervening in their lives and bringing about a solution to their situations or a change to their lives. And the reasoning is simple – if there is no other God than the Lord God Almighty, the Great I Am, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, there's no way that prayers to anyone else but Him, can be answered. It seems like they were also aware that their prayers were going nowhere and so they simultaneously did all they could to ease the situation they were in. This seems like a very sad predicament for anyone to be in – to have a problem, to cry out to the one they thought would be able to help and to not have a response.

- **Prayer and Work**

It seemed like they had come to a point in their understanding about their gods, where they realised that nothing much happens when they pray, and so they immediately also work things out themselves, which then begs the question, "Why pray?" Had they been through experiences like Moses and the people of Israel had been through in the wilderness, like the terrible situation where the Red Sea was ahead and Pharaoh's army was behind, and had they heard the words that Moses spoke to the people in **Exodus 14:13-14** *"Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace,"* then perhaps they would have cried out and just waited. But like I said earlier, they were crying out to no one. If one is crying out to 'no one, then no one will come to help, and sadly, that's exactly who helped them – no one. May I add a little note here - if not for the Lord's intervention the life of us The Church, we'd still be praying to 'no one.'

When we look at the above two scenarios – the mariners on the Mediterranean sea, and the people of Israel at the Red Sea, (not too far away), we find two different approaches to handling problematic situations. One was praying and working and the other was merely waiting on the Lord to work on their behalf. There's something we can learn about praying and working from these two incidents. Just because Moses told the people of Israel to stand still and wait for the Lord to fight their battle at that point of time, does not mean that every time we The Church encounter difficulties, that we are to merely pray and do nothing to help solve the problem. There are times when we need to pray and do nothing, and there are times when we need to pray and are supposed to do something about the situation as the Lord leads.

Take Noah for example. When God told him to build the ark because he was about to destroy the world, he could have taken the easy way out by merely praying and asking the Lord to change His mind about destroying the world, instead of taking the tough road of obedience to

God, and building the ark so that he, his family and the animals and birds could be saved. We The Church need to know when to only pray, when to only work and when to both pray and work.

All too often, in my growing years, when I was immature in my faith in the Lord, I had a warped understanding of prayer and work, and very often I'd find myself praying about things I should have been working on. For example, while in school, when I needed to study hard to pass my exams, I would prefer to rather pray that the Lord would lead me to study answers to questions that He knew would appear in the question paper, (not knowing then that God is just and doesn't work that way), so as to minimise the effort I took to study. As you can imagine, I was so wrong in my approach and I had to face the consequences of my lethargy and careless praying. Here's a quote by Augustine, concerning praying and working. "Pray like everything depended on God and work like everything depended on you." But we need to know what situations call for what kind of response.

- **What' really matters**

The job of the mariners was the transport the cargo from Joppa to Tarshish, but due to the present situation they were in, they had to make a decision as to what was really important to them – their ship and their lives or their job. It seems a lot like the situation we are in presently in the world with this Corona Virus, where people are having to make similar decisions – choices between their jobs and their lives; and several people are choosing their lives over their jobs and so quitting their jobs.
The Church too is having to make decisions during this pandemic as to what's really important and what can be done away with. And interestingly it's turning out that we are getting a lot more creative and effective in what we do recently, than we've been in years gone by.

- **Whose' really matters**

The value of the mariners' job (to transport goods from one place to another), suddenly faded into oblivion, when compared with the value of their ship and their lives. Not only did they have to make quick mental calculations to decide which was more important but they also had to decide which was more precious to them - other people's belongings or their ship and their lives.

It's true of most of us today as well. When left with a choice between saving what belongs to us and what belongs to others, most of us would choose to protect our own, rather than what belongs to others. How opposite to that of Jesus who willingly, lovingly, graciously and mercifully laid down His life, (and was raised again), so that we could be saved from eternal death and have a new and eternal life.

We can be thankful that we don't need to make a choice between saving our lives and other people's lives - we can save both ours and theirs. We were saved by the Lord so that we can share the good news of the Gospel with others, so that they too might be saved.

- **What doesn't really matter**

Many churches had so many overhead expenses that were truly unnecessary and were adding nothing to the growth of the church, (either numerically or spiritually), and with the lockdown, they've come to realise that they could be as effective, if not more, without some of these huge overhead expenses. But let's be careful as we make these decisions to dispose of the seemingly non-essential, that we don't dispose of the essential in lieu of the non-essential. We need to remember that people are more important than buildings, since The Church was never a

building – it was always people. The quicker we realise that the Church is not the building but rather, the people, the quicker we will see results in Church growth like never before. It will also serve to accelerate the process of making disciples of all nations.

Let's make it a point in these turbulent times to do all we can to not just stay afloat but to make headway in the journey that we've been called to of walking with the Lord and inviting other to join us on this journey.

To lighten the load

The reason behind them wanting to dispose of the cargo was clearly spelt out in this verse – 'to lighten the load.' Different people have different traveling styles – some travel heavy and some travel light and there are usually reasons for these styles. But when the going gets rough, there comes a time in the journey when we need to stop and ask ourselves what we really need and what we don't, for the express purpose of alleviating the load we carry. I recall when my mother, two younger brothers and I cycled and walked long distances for no apparent reason, she would dispose of things that weighed us down, so as to lighten the load. There were times we would rather eat the food we had rather than carry it on our backs, as it was easier to carry it in us than on us. The same is true of people who go hiking and trekking – they carry only the bare essentials. Athletes wear as little as possible to make themselves as light as possible.

Let's ask ourselves what we, The Church in the world can do to lighten the load so as to move faster, and become more effective in our task of making disciples of all nations.

8 - The Sleeper

– **Jonah 1:5** *"But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep."*

But Jonah

We just read the part of the story where the sailors are struggling to keep the ship afloat and save their lives, by disposing of the cargo, so as to lighten the ship, but here's another scene on that same ship – one that is amusingly strange. Jonah, the one who is the real cause for all this chaos, fear and loss of property, is totally oblivious to the situation around him. The words, "But Jonah," says a lot. It says that Jonah was in no way perturbed by the situation around him. It says that he was disconnected from the reality around. It says that though he was the cause of the trouble, he did not seem to care about anyone or anything but himself.

Similarly, the world is in turmoil right now. In more ways than one, and I personally believe that we The Church are responsible for what's happening around us. We have not been the people of God that we were called to be. We have not been the reflection of the Lord to the world; instead, we've allowed the world to permeate The Church. The Lord has given us the responsibility to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, but we have become anything but salt and light. Overall, we're hardly adding any taste and light to the world.

Young people are leaving the church at an alarming rate today, like never before. They are becoming disillusioned with Christianity and are seeking other faiths - or no faith at all. Christian families are splitting at such a pace that we are becoming models to the rest of the world of what it is to separate and continue to live as though nothing is amiss. No wonder the Bible says that God's name is being blasphemed among the gentiles because of us. This might seem like a very hard statement to make, but it's true all the same. Buildings where churches used to meet are being sold off for other purposes. Parents are no longer passing on their faith to the next generation. The Church is seeking the world more than the world is seeking the world – and sadly, very often, we're doing it all in the name of the Lord. I myself have been guilty of this and have had to repent of this sin. But there's a lot more repenting that needs to be done by us The Church across the globe. We are in the last days, and the signs are there for all to see – even a non-Christian seems to know that the world is very near it's end. It's time we stopped and repented of our negligent, self-centred ways and sought God and His ways with all our heart and mind and lived what we profess with all our bodies.

Had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship

We already looked at the fact that Jonah had chosen to go down into the ship and now we see a little more detail given as to the reason for the choice of his location on the ship. Jonah seemed to be very familiar, not only with the structure of the ship, but also with the workings of the ship. He knew where the best spaces were, and which was the most comfortable. He seemed to know something about Physics; that the lower in the ship you are, the less the swaying and tossing around; and for one who sought to sleep his way to Tarshish, that's the kind of place he needed. So good was his choice of his sleeping spot, that even a tempest did not disturb him.

Let's look at ourselves as The Church. Have we chosen the choicest comfort zones with the hope of never being disturbed by anyone, including God? Have we rejected God's call on our lives to be His witnesses in the world? While on the surface it seems very smart of us to choose comfort over calling, we need to realise that running away from God is certainly not a smart thing to do. That kind of comfort, cosy as it may seem, will be short-lived. Though we may have forgotten the reason why we were called to believe in Jesus, the Lord hasn't forgotten the reason He called us - and He never will. To those of us who are in such comfort zones, this message may not sit very well with us, but the purpose of this message is not to add to our comfort, but for us to come to grips with the reality of who we The Church are and how far we've gone from being what we were called to be.

Had lain down and was fast asleep

For many of us those words, 'lie down,' sound very welcome words, especially after a hard day's work. It provides the much needed rest to the body to rejuvenate us for the next day's work. Depriving oneself of sleep can have really drastic effects on one's body and mind as well.

Jonah had chosen a comfortable, stable place at the bottom of the ship where he could lie down and sleep and that's exactly what he did. He fell into a deep sleep - deep inside the ship while it was battling the winds and the waves in the deep Mediterranean Sea. Everything was going according to his plan and that must have excited him until he fell asleep and became oblivious to the storm that was raging around him.

When we The Church make choices that are self-centred, and when we make plans that include none but ourselves, and spare no thought for God's will in our lives, things might go smoothly for a while – so smooth that we can drop into a deep sleep. That's exactly where we are at present. Despite this global pandemic, nothing much has changed in The Church globally. The Church, to a large extent, is deep asleep and this, despite the storm that's raging outside. The world is in a turmoil, not only because of the infection of the virus, not only because of the way it's taking lives and affecting livelihood, but also because it's affecting the minds and emotions of people in a way that they're finding it hard to handle. While many are putting up brave fronts, that's not the reality of what they are facing inside. The world is looking for ways to understand what's happening; they're looking for ways to cope with this new normal. They are looking for answers, and we The Church do have the answers, but we're too busy taking care of ourselves that the cares of the world around don't seem to concern us at all.

This is not the time for us The Church to be 'sleeping' – this is the time for us to be awake and actively engaged in connecting with the world around, offering them all the support we can in the form of prayer, hope, financial assistance, jobs, advice, a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on and more. It is by God's amazing grace that we are not seeing as many people in the church infected and dying from this virus as we initially imagined we would see. Let's not only thank the Lord for His amazing protection on our lives, but let's also do all we can (while we can), to be a blessing to those outside. This is the time for us to wake up, and if we don't wake up we will be woken up rudely to the reality of the situation around us. Let's save that for the next devotion.

9 - The Awakening

Jonah 1:6 – *"So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."*

So the captain came to him, and said to him
A Rude Awakening
When the news of Jonah sleeping got to the captain's ears, he came down himself to meet Jonah. One of the worst things that can happen to someone who's sound asleep is for someone to awaken them with a loud voice and in anger. It disorients a person and it takes time for the person to realise what's happening as he transitions from that blissful world into the world of reality. One can imagine Jonah's thoughts and feelings when he's awoken out of his slumber. I'm sure the Captain must have been amazed at the ability of Jonah to sleep amidst such a terrible tempest. It must have also infuriated him that while he and his team of sailors are battling to save the ship and their lives, that there's a man who can, not only be so oblivious to the situation, but could also be so sound asleep. I'm sure with the combination of the emotions, of fear for their lives, anxiety as to how to proceed further, and anger at Jonah sleeping, the Captain must have been rather stern when he spoke to Jonah.

What do you mean…
He begins by asking Jonah what he means by sleeping. His question can mean one of several things – I've just mentioned three possibilities below.

1. How can you sleep amidst such a crisis?
2. Do you think we deserve what we're getting?
3. Are you sleeping, hoping the problem will disappear or be solved?

We can look at ourselves, The Church and ask ourselves the above 3 questions

1. **Are we asleep amidst this global crisis?**

When people are crying out to their *'gods'* for answers concerning this pandemic, when they're being gripped with the fear of death and when every area of their lives is being affected, are we, The Church being complacent, living like nothing's amiss or are we actively involved in helping those around us the best we can? Are we doing all we can to make God known to those around who are searching for the truth at this earth-shaking time? People are a lot more open now than they've ever been to the Gospel and we need to be as much involved as possible in sharing it in love. The world is in need of love, encouragement, motivation and love more now than it's been in the recent past.

2. **Do we think that people are getting what they deserve?**

I'm sure this thought has crossed some of our minds recently when we considered how some cities or countries were worse affected by this virus than others, as if it were an act of God to punish some more than others. We need to remember Jesus' words in **Luke 13:1-5** where he responded to those who told him about an incident where Herod had mingled the blood of certain Galileans with their own sacrifices. Jesus said that they were not worse sinners than all the other Galileans and went on to add that if the people talking to him didn't repent, they would perish in the same way. Jesus then mentioned another incident, where the tower of Siloam fell on, and killed 18 people in Jerusalem, and He asked whether they were worse sinners than all others who lived in Jerusalem, and he went on to say, *'No,'* and added that unless the people speaking with Him repented, they would perish in the same way. We can't afford to be judgmental about people as we're all sailing in the same boat at the moment.

3. Are we sleeping, hoping this pandemic will disappear?

The world around is in turmoil – without a proper understanding of how to proceed through this period – lockdowns, openings up and more lockdowns are making it rather hard to come to grips with, dealing with the grief of losing loved ones, the fear of death gripping people's hearts, losing jobs or being paid half salaries, the stress of online studies and work, the separation from friends and so much more. But through all of this the voice of The Church worldwide is not heard loud enough. Are we enjoying a siesta, being concerned about no one but ourselves at this time? Have we forgotten that the reason we were left back on earth after our conversion was to help those around us in every possible way and eventually point them to their Creator, who alone can save them from not just physical death, but death eternal? Do we suppose that this Pandemic will disappear, just like it appeared and that all will be well again? It's not really that likely that this is the way things are going to pan out. There seems to be the hand of the Lord involved in this, and we. The Church, seem to be the ones whose attention the Lord is trying to get to get us back on track of fulfilling the Great Commission.

Sleeper

Have you noticed how our reference to people depends so much on our feelings towards them at that particular time? When all's going well, we use pet names or affectionate names to refer to them. When we get a little upset about something, and there's a tinge of anger, then we call them by their regular names or sometimes, even by their full names and when emotions are high, then we rename at our discretion, with names that best describe their behaviour at the moment. In this case, it's obvious that the Captain was in the 3rd category, where his emotions were flying high, and he called Jonah by a name that best described him at the moment – *'Sleeper.'* There's nothing wrong in sleeping – it's a God-given gift, but there's a time for everything, and when in a crisis, that's the last thing you'd expect someone to be doing.

If the world were to look at The Church today, especially during this pandemic, how would they refer to us? Would it be with beautiful names that express their appreciation for all we do for them? Will it be with a tinge of anger for what we are not doing for them? Or will it be with names that depicts their anger towards our behaviour toward them during these tough times? Will they, by any chance refer to us '*Sleepers?'*

Arise, call on your god

All the mariners had called on their *'gods,'* now it was time for Jonah to call on his God. The word, *'arise,'* seems to suggest that the first few words of the Captain were spoken to Jonah while he was still lying down, after being rudely awoken from his deep sleep. The Captain asks him to arise and to call on his God. Isn't it surprising that people who didn't really know God were waking up someone who knew God, telling him to pray?

As we interact with unbelievers during these days, what we're observing is that they are seeking God a lot more now than perhaps some of us who claim to know the Lord. They are also a lot more open to the Gospel now, than they've ever been, but the question is, *"Are we taking the time to share it with them?"* It's as if the world around is shaking us up and telling us to call on our God. It's about time we The Church called on God about this crisis in a way like we've never done before. We can't afford to remain asleep when the world around is in turmoil. The words of Jesus in **Mathew 26:40-41** rings true for a time such as this – "*Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Perhaps your god will consider us
Whatever the concept of God is to the Captain, it's clear that he seems to believe that God can have mercy on them so that they don't perish. They had tried all the 'gods' they believed in and nothing changed, so now they ask Jonah to call on his God for help. Isn't it surprising that people who don't believe in the true God, seem to have an understanding that God is merciful and will answer prayer?

Do we, The Church still believe in a God of mercy, who answers our prayers or has God been reduced in our lives to a mere traditional, ritualistic, once a week affair, where He's no longer personal to us? Have we fled from God's call on our lives and is the Lord trying to get our attention to get back to Him and His calling for us?

So that we may not perish
It's a well-known fact that man's biggest fear is the fear of death and during this pandemic this fear, which lay low for so long, has surfaced like no other time in the recent past. This fear seems to be the sailors' biggest fear at this moment in the story – the fear of death. It was so obvious, that the Captain actually verbalised his fear, asking Jonah to call on his God, *"so that we may not perish."*

For us The Church, is death still our biggest fear in life? Now that we have come to know the Author of life – Jesus, we don't need to fear death like the rest of the world. Death for us is a step from life into life in eternity. Having received this amazing gift of life from God Himself, we need to be a lot more concerned about the perishing world around, and do all we can to ensure that they get saved.

Let's stop and do a soul-searching with the light of the Holy Spirit and be open to what He reveals to us about our walk with the Lord, and about fulfilling God's planned purpose for our lives as individuals and as The Church at large. May we do all we can to get back into an intimate relationship with the Lord – one that we enjoyed when we first came to know Him.

10 - The Interrogation

Jonah 1:7 – *"And they said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us.'"*

And they said to one another
This was a team problem – not just a problem faced by one of the sailors; and for a team problem, there needs to be a team solution. Very often when there's a team problem, the team tends to look up to one or two people (Pastor, Coach, Manager, Boss etc) to solve the problem. But it's usually the effort of the entire team that helps solve a team problem. Isn't it interesting that the verse doesn't say, "And the Captain said…" It says, "They said to one another," meaning that the entire team was involved in trying to resolve the crisis they were in.

The world is facing a crisis at the moment – a crisis that's more than a health and financial crisis. It's one that's affecting almost every area of our lives. It isn't just one country or a few countries that are facing this crisis – the whole world is being affected by it. And if that's the case, then the solution should be not be worked out at city-level, state-level, or national levels – the solution needs to be worked on at a global level, with all nations coming together to do what can be done. This requires a team effort.

Likewise, The Church at large needs to come together to seek the Lord for a solution for this crisis that is facing our world. Jesus said that we (The Church) are 'the Salt of the earth,' and 'the Light of the world.' If that is the case, then we should be earnestly, desperately, unitedly and continuously seeking the Lord for His solution to this crisis. We can't afford to take this situation lightly and relax, waiting for it to disappear, because there are no such signs prevalent anywhere in the world at present – in fact the opposite is true. If we, The Church are quiet, then it means we care nothing for both our lives and for those around us as well. The Lord is counting on us to make a difference. We need to come together like never before and plead with the Lord for both ourselves and on behalf of the world. And until the crisis is ended, we also need to be available to the world around to serve them in every way possible. People are struggling in so many practical ways; they suffering emotionally, they are suffering mental stress, and they are struggling spiritually, seeking answers from their gods and finding none. We need to reach out to them in love like never before and demonstrate the love we so enjoy and so profess to possess.

"Come let us cast lots"
Different cultures have different ways they seek guidance for various situations. Sometimes, people in the same culture may have different methods they employ to seek guidance for direction. In the case of the mariners, they decided to cast lots – perhaps a method that was prevalent back in their day (as it still is in some places today). There are different ways people cast lots even today. We're not sure which method they employed to cast lots, but that's what they did to arrive at the answer to their question.

As The Church, what do we do when we need guidance in various situations in our lives? Do we employ worldly methods to seek the Lord's guidance or do we just seek the Lord Himself for guidance? We don't need to follow any particular method to seek the Lord's guidance – we just need to seek the Lord. Now the Lord may use any method He chooses to guide us - that's His prerogative, but all we need to do is to seek Him. The problem with following a particular method for seeking guidance from the Lord is that once we get used to using certain methods, then we tend to idolise those methods and not really seek the Lord.

That we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us
No Normal Storm
The mariners realised that, despite their skills at sea and their knowledge about the wind and the waves, they were in a crisis that was beyond their control or intervention. They seemed to know that this was no ordinary, regular storm – there was something supernatural about it. They saw the hand of God in it. This is evident from the fact that they began asking another - "Who's responsible for this trouble?" They believed that someone on the ship was responsible for the trouble they were facing, and they wanted to get to the bottom of who it was.

The Hand of God?
Isn't it clear from the way this virus has taken over the world, that there's more than a human hand in what's happening? This is no regular health crisis. Think about it's impact on every area of life and on every country in the world. Could this really be a man-made disaster? Could God have a hand in sending this into the world for a reason?

Who's to Blame?
Very often, when faced with a situation or a conflict in life, our first reaction is to seek someone to blame. Somehow when we pin someone with blame, the problem seems to decrease in magnitude. It doesn't really solve the problem, but the problem seems more manageable. The blame game is really an age-old problem – it began in the Garden of Eden and has not ended till date. It's prevalent in marriage relationships, amongst siblings, friends, at work places, in neighbourhoods and even amongst leaders of countries. There are no racial, national, community, religious divides when it comes to playing the blame game – we all enjoy it and play it really well. It'll be hard to find a winner for this game – we're all experts.

This was precisely true of the sailors too. They were faced with a huge and life-threatening situation. Firstly, they needed to find someone to blame, and they set out with a plan to do just that. After the captains' stern talk with Jonah, they decided on a method to discover the person responsible for the storm.

The world is facing the worst health crisis it's ever faced and at the moment it seems like we're all fighting a losing battle with this virus. But as usual, the blame game has started with countries blaming one another for the crisis, and as always, this isn't solving the problem, but rather aggravating it.

Questions to God
We need to stop and ask the Lord why we are going through what we are going through across the globe. I wonder how much responsibility we as The Church have to take for the 'storm' the world is facing during this global pandemic. Have we not done our job of discipling the nations? Have we boarded our get-away ships in the attempts to flee from our life's call to make disciples of the world? Is this the Lord's way of waking us up out of our deep slumber? Are we responsible for what the world is suffering right now (we aren't exempt either). It's time to rise up and plead with the Lord for mercy, both for us The Church, and for the world as well.

While we're waiting for the Lord to intervene, let's also get involved with helping people around who are going through mental, emotional, physical and spiritual issues. They have needs that many of us can help meet and thereby demonstrate the love of God to them in a very tangible way. Let's remember what someone once said, "People don't care how much we know

until they know how much we care." But most of all, their real need is to come to faith in Jesus and be saved from a lost eternity and that's what we were saved for – nothing less.

If each of us search ourselves, we'll find all of us The Church, searching ourselves and if all of us do, perhaps the Lord will have mercy and intervene and bring about reprieve to this situation. But if we continue to sail along in our deep slumber, let's be prepared for worse times ahead.

11 - The Culprit

Jonah 1:7-8: *"So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, 'Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?'"*

So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah
To every investigation, there's got to be the discovery of the culprit – sometimes it takes a while and sometimes it happens instantly. In this case, it was an instant revelation – Jonah was the culprit responsible for the storm. What a sad turn of events. The man who was chosen by the God of the Universe to go and give a warning message to sinful people is now at the receiving end. He's the one who's the culprit, responsible for the trouble that both he and many others are facing. The man who thought that the people of Nineveh were too sinful to go and talk to, is now the one who's guilty of sinful rebellion. We know what God thinks of disobedience, rebellion, and stubbornness as recorded in **1 Samuel 15:22-23** – *"Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."*

While looking at this global pandemic, I wonder what role we, The Church play in contributing to this crisis. Like Jonah, we have been commissioned by Jesus Himself, to make disciples of all nations; and like Jonah, we too have, to a large extent, neglected this responsibility, and call of God on our lives and rebelled against God. We've become so caught up with ourselves instead that we've put to risk the lives of those around us – the lives of those whom the Lord died to save and left us here to help save from a lost eternity. I won't be surprised if it soon becomes clear to the world around that we are the ones responsible for 'the storms,' the world is facing at present. Just like Jonah stood guilty before the mariners, do we stand guilty before a world that was meant to be saved by the life-saving gospel of Jesus? If that's where we are at present, then it's time to repent and turn back to the Lord before it's too late. Let those of us in The Church, who are convicted of our rebellion stop today and do a U-turn and get back to the Lord and His call to make disciples of all nations.

Then they said to him, 'Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us?
When the lot fell on Jonah they requested him to tell them who was responsible for the trouble they were facing. By then, though they knew that Jonah had a role to play in the trouble they were facing they still asked him who he thought was the cause for it. Most often in life, it's a wonderful thing to be asked a question for which you know the answer, and in those times, we can't wait to blurt it out no sooner the question's asked, but this was not one such time for Jonah. This was not an answer he was waiting to blurt out to the mariners. It was an answer he was trying to hide from the world, but one that was surfacing like a submarine at sea.

What would we, The Church say if we were asked this same question by the world around? "Who is responsible for the global crisis we are facing?" That's a very valid question that not only should the world be asking of us The Church, but we should be asking ourselves as well. "Who is responsible for this crisis?" Is it nature, human error (or planning), the devil's work, sin, or have we brought this upon ourselves and the world due to our rebellion against God to take His Word to The World and make disciples of all nations?

What is your occupation?
The question, *"What do you do?"* comes up in the first 60 seconds of a conversation with a person we meet for the first time. It seems like the identity of most people is so tied up with

one's occupation, that the first thing we try to do when we meet someone for the first time, is to size them up by their occupation. Notice how we react to the responses we get to the question, *"What do you do?"* Most people continue or discontinue the conversation with the person depending on the response to that question. It's funny how this virus has taught us in no uncertain terms that no one is exempt from being infected or affected, no matter what their occupation. It's also taught many of us that our occupations are not permanent and as stable as we thought after all.

That's a good question to ask ourselves The Church though. What is our occupation? What keeps us believers in Jesus busy every day? What consumes our desires, thoughts, words, energies, money, time and other resources? Are we busy living for ourselves and our selfish desires or are we busy living to fulfil God's purpose for saving us from a life of sin and death?

And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?
For many people, the question, "Where are you from?" plays a major role in whether one develops a friendship with someone or not. This question is also one of the top 3 questions we ask someone we meet for the first time. This again is a sizing-up question, especially in places and cultures like India, where the place of birth is so connected with one's identity. This usually refers to the city, town, or village of one's birth. But the next question they ask him pertains to his country of birth. In a cosmopolitan city today, that might be a very important question that one ponders on, though one may not directly ask it for the fear of appearing racist. All the same, it's tied up with one's identity. The third question they ask Jonah pertains to his religion perhaps or his community. Once again an important question for many, and a deciding factor on whether to build a relationship with someone or not. All these three questions can be summed up in three simple words, *"Who are you?"* The mariners wanted to know more about Jonah before they wanted to know how he was responsible for the storm. It's amazing that even in this difficult situation, identity played such an important role.

If we, The Church were asked the first two questions, *"Where do you come from,"* and *"What is your country"* what would our response be? We cannot mention the name of any one village, town, or city, because we are from villages, towns, provinces, districts, cities, and states from different nations all across the globe. We do not belong to any one place here on earth. In fact, we do not belong here on earth at all – we are merely sojourners here. **(Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11).**

If we were asked the third question, *"Of what people are you?"* what would our response be? Once again, we can't claim to have come from any one faith, because we've all come from different faiths – faiths in different gods, faith in no god (atheists), or the non-acknowledgment of faith in God (agnostics). As Peter said in **1 Peter 2:9-10**, *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."* Let's never forget who we are, because if we do, before long we will forget why we are. Once we forget our identity, it's not long before we forget our purpose. Sadly, to a large extent, The Church at-large has an identity crisis. We have forgotten who we are and we're sailing along in life, presently being battered by the winds that perhaps we have brought upon ourselves.

Let do what we can to help turn the tide. The Lord Himself said in **2 Chronicles 7:13-14** says, *"When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble*

themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." From these verses, it's clearly evident that the people of God have a role to play in the health of their nation wherever that might be. In fact, it's further evident that we need to humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face and turn from our wicked ways, so the Lord will hear from heaven, forgive our sins and heal our land. Let's each of us in The Church repent while we can lest something worse come upon us.

#12 – The Man

Jonah 1:9 – *"So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."*

"So he said to them…"
Since Jonah had been both awoken from sleep and had been identified as the man who was behind the tempest they were facing, and since he was asked questions pertaining to his identity, it was time to respond to these very important questions.

Just as Jonah had sought to flee from God's presence (and the call of God to be his messenger), we The Church have, to a large extent deliberately and consistently done the same. But there's only so long we can run away from God; only so long one can blend in with the crowd, to hide our true identity as the people of God on a global mission. The Lord knows what it takes to get us talking, and the first message we will be called to give the world, is not so much about what we are about but rather, who we are and that's what Jonah was made to do too. He was put in a corner as it were, and made to reveal his true identity.

He was not an everyday passenger that the mariners encountered – there was something unique about him, and as hard as he tried to hide himself and his identity, it was the moment of truth for him. I wonder whether this global pandemic will be that moment of truth for The Church as well. Will the Lord use this to reveal the true identity of the church to the world around?

"…I am a Hebrew…"
The first thing that Jonah reveals about himself is not his name, his father's name, his place of birth or any other detail that we would find ourselves sharing about when introducing ourselves to a stranger. The first thing he reveals about himself concerns his faith and nationality, which were closely tied to one another. He refers to himself as a Hebrew, which was a term that Israelites used to describe themselves to foreigners. To an outsider, the word, 'Hebrew,' would immediately get a picture of a person who was of a nation that believed in one God.

When we, The Church are questioned concerning our identity, I'm sure most of us wouldn't go around revealing ourselves as citizens of heaven (though in actual fact that's what we really are). We don't really belong to earth, we are merely sojourners here – we belong to heaven – forever. We've really forgotten who we are and we've begun to perceive ourselves just as the people of the world perceive themselves, as citizens of earthly countries, and nothing more. Little wonder we find ourselves holding to, and living by values that the world holds and lives by.

"…And I fear the Lord…"
Not only does Jonah reveal himself as a Hebrew, thereby revealing his nationality and faith, but he goes on to say something about his attitude towards God. The word, 'and,' gives the picture that not only does he belong to, but he also believes in. Not only does he belong to the Hebrew people who worship the Lord, but he also fears the Lord.

The word, *'fear,'* refers to awe, reverence, adoration, honour, worship, confidence, thankfulness, love, and, yes, fear as well. So when Jonah said that he feared the Lord, he was saying in effect that God was everything to him. He was saying that his life revolves around God. Going by the story so far, it's far from evident though that Jonah is being consistent with

his profession of faith in God. It doesn't look like his life is really revolving around God at the moment. It certainly looks like his world revolves around himself.

How so like The Church of today, where we so openly and readily proclaim our faith in the Lord Jesus in words, but more often than not, our life speaks a rather contradictory message. We all know that when our words and our actions don't match, it's only our actions that play a role in really communicating to people around who we really are. That's why Jesus said, "By their fruit you will know them." Someone said, "What you do speaks so loud, I can't hear what you're saying." I think, like Jonah, very often we truly want to be known as people who love and serve God with all our hearts, but very often, the way we live our lives send mixed signals to the world around about who we are and what we're about.

"The God of heaven"

Jonah then goes on to explain who 'The Lord' is. Perhaps the mariners would have understood the words, 'the Lord,' to mean just about any so-called god of the day, so he goes on to begin introducing God next. Jonah seemed to know what all of us need to never forget – that our true identity is found in God. It's only in knowing God that we begin to know both ourselves and our purpose in life. So even without mentioning his own name to the mariners, Jonah goes on to tell them about God – the one behind his life. He refers to 'The Lord,' as 'The God of heaven.' On first hearing of these words, 'the God of heaven,' it gives the listener or reader a picture of a God who is distant, unreachable and unknowable – a picture that many people in the world possess of God. It's only those of us who've come to know Him personally through His Son Jesus, that know that he is close, reachable and personally and intimately knowable. These words 'the God of heaven,' also paint a picture of a powerful God, who not only inhabits heaven but also possesses heaven.

What's our understanding of God as The Church? Is He distant and unknowable or is He close, reachable and personally and intimately knowable? Do we know God as the one true God who both lives in and owns? Is He the King and Ruler of our lives, or is He just a name we use in a vain and in an all-too-casual way, where we don't honour, respect, surrender to, love and obey him, and therefore give a rather cheap impression of God to the world around? Our understanding of, and our belief in God determines our behaviour, and our behaviour reveals God to the world around. What picture of God are we painting to the world around?

"…Who made the sea and the dry land"

Jonah goes on to introduce God a little more than just the God of heaven. He now introduces Him as the Creator of the earth – the sea and the dry land. Not only does God inhabit and own heaven, but since God created the sea and the dry land as well, He owns these as well. Interestingly, they're on the sea when he mentions that God created the sea, adding a little detail in the picture of God to the mariners that God is behind the tempest they are experiencing. I'm sure at that point, there's one thing they're all cherishing like they never cherished before – it's dry land and going by the looks of things, it doesn't seem like they'll be there ever again. But one thing is clearly revealed by Jonah to the mariners, - that God is powerful, He's the owner, and He's the ruler of heaven, the sea and the dry land. That's a beautiful picture of God to paint – even though it seemed like it would be the last picture he'd ever paint. Even though Jonah was not talking about God to the people he was supposed to, he was making the effort to paint a picture of God to the sailors, on a journey that seemed would be his last journey ever. What's the picture of God we're painting to the world? Are we painting a picture of a loving, holy, just, awesome, powerful, wise, all-knowing, gracious, merciful (and more) God, who is close, reachable and personally and intimately knowable, and who can transform lives both

here and forever? Or are we painting a picture of a God who's small, distant, unreachable, unknowable, unholy, unloving, unjust ungracious, unmerciful (and more) powerless and irrelevant to people's lives? Let's know God for who He really is and let's paint that same picture of Him to the world around. That's why we were saved and that's why we were left back on earth after we were saved.

13 - The Terrifying Question

Jonah 1:10 – *"This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD because he had already told them so.)"*

"This terrified them…"
In our last devotion, we saw how Jonah introduced himself to the mariners as a Hebrew who worshipped the Lord - the Lord who made the sea and the dry land. This introduction of Jonah to the mariners was enough to instil fear in them. Let's look at other possible reasons for this fear.

Did the fact that he was a Hebrew itself say enough to them, as the Hebrews were known as God's chosen people, who had been delivered by the Lord Himself, from the land of Egypt and who had led them through the years in amazing ways like no other nation had been led? Or were they terrified of the God of the Hebrews as they had heard that He was powerful and had destroyed nations on their behalf? Or were they afraid because of the words of Jonah, who said that He worshipped the God who had created the sea and the dry land, which means that if He had created the sea, then this storm was sent by Him, and if that was the case, then there was nothing they could do to get themselves out of this situation.

When the world around looks at us, The Church, what emotions and thoughts well up inside them? Are they instilled by fear of the true God we worship, are they drawn to Him as the God of love, on account of the love we share with them? Do they admire his holiness based on the lives we lead? Do they scorn us for claiming to worship a God whom we've never seen? Do they belittle us for beliefs that seem so foolish in their eyes? Do they persecute us because they think we are a threat to them? Or do they just ignore us like we never existed since we are no longer relevant to them in any way?

Whatever the attitude of the world has been to the church until now, this pandemic is changing things big time across the globe. The world is beginning to search for the truth, and in that process are being led to us, The Church with questions, for support, for encouragement, for hope, comfort, and more. Will they come to us with questions, just like the mariners were led to Jonah with questions? When they interact with us, what will be the response they receive from us concerning these turbulent times? Our response to them determines whether or not they are led into the Kingdom or led further away. It's really important that we, The Church take every opportunity during these trying times to share the love of God, and the gospel of Jesus with our non-Christian friends and families, and do all we can to lead them to Christ so their lives are transformed both for here and for eternity.

(They knew he was running away from the LORD because he had already told them so.)"
It says that Jonah had also told them that he was running away from the Lord, and so it was obvious to the mariners that God was now catching up with Jonah and that they were now in the middle of this life-threatening scene. I wonder at the possible thoughts racing through their minds at this time. Perhaps they were thinking, "If the God of the Hebrews is expressing His anger against one man whom He sent on a mission to take his message of warning to a nation, what would the end be for us who don't know God, and the quality of whose lives could be no better than the people of Nineveh?" If God would not spare His own prophet who rebelled against Him, how can we stand against Him? This reminds us of Proverbs 11:31, which says, "If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner." A similar rendering of this verse is found in **1 Peter 4:17,18**, *"For the time has come for*

judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" I'm sure this was another cause for the terror that the mariners were now gripped with – a fear of the God of the Hebrews who was at work right in their midst.

When I look at this pandemic, and the way it sneaked up on the world, without even one Christian having an inkling of its arrival, I wonder whether this was sent by the Lord Himself to wake up The Church and shake up The Church across the globe. Is the Lord getting our attention and warning us that if we don't do what we've been called to do, we will end up in a far worse state than we were before we were saved? It's my own wonderings about these turbulent times.

Not only had Jonah hidden his God-ordained purpose for that moment in his life but he was also attempting to flee from it. Have we, The Church hidden from the world our God-ordained purpose in life - to help them find all that we have discovered in God through our faith in Jesus - love, joy, peace, forgiveness, hope, freedom, eternal life, salvation, and more, or are they aware that we are here to help save them?

Not only is this a refining moment for The Church, but it is also a defining moment for The Church. We can't afford to let these moments pass us by unnoticed or to be taken lightly. The Lord, on account of great His love for us, will do all it takes to get us back on track of fulfilling the purposes for which He saved us. Just because we've forgotten our purpose, let's not for one moment assume that God has forgotten too.

"…and they asked, "What have you done?..."
The terrifying fear resulted in them asking Jonah yet another very pertinent question – a question he must have been asking himself from the moment he began trying to flee from the Lord's presence – "What have you done?" Perhaps he realised that he was the cause for this tempest and that he had put both his life and the lives of other people (and other people's cargo) in jeopardy. It's the question we The Church would need to ask ourselves if we, by our disobedience to God's call on our lives, have put both our lives and that of others in danger for eternity - *"What have we done?"*

And if the above is true, and if the world were to discover this truth about the reasons for this pandemic, I wonder what emotions would fill their hearts. Will they question us the way the mariners questioned Jonah? Will they say to us, "What have you done?" Why are you fleeing from the call of God on your lives? Why were you not telling us the truth about who God is, even though you discovered this yourselves? Why were you keeping it to yourselves? Didn't you care for our souls? If God is dealing with you the way He is, what's going to be our fate now? Will these be some of the questions they will ask us, The Church?

We don't need to wait for the world to ask us these questions – we can ask them ourselves and make the necessary changes and get back on track of fulfilling God's purpose in saving us. Let's not wait until tomorrow – we're not guaranteed it. Let's stop, ponder, repent and return to the Lord and to His call on our lives.

14 – The Decisive Question

Jonah 1:11: *"Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"—for the sea was growing more tempestuous."*

"What shall we do to you…"
In our last devotion, we looked at the first question the sailors asked Jonah – *"What have you done?" Even before Jonah could respond to that question, they throw him the next question – "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"* If you look carefully at this question, it's really a loaded one. Let's look at it a little closer.

Sometimes when questions are asked, it isn't so much because answers are required but more as a means of suggesting an answer. Such questions are called suggestive questions. Though the sailors were not asking an outright suggestive question, if you read between the lines, there is a glimpse of a possible solution hidden in the question. It seems like they've decided that since Jonah was the cause for the tempest they were facing that he was the one who would have to decide what needed to be done. Very often we think that the person responsible for a problem also has the solution to the problem – that's not always true. Sometimes problem makers have nothing to do with the solution. In this case, though, we'll find that Jonah did have a solution.

Not only are they asking Jonah for a possible solution, but it looks like they've decided that they should do something to Jonah and they want him to decide the course of action. It's interesting that they didn't make the decision as to how to deal with Jonah but they left that choice to him.

"…That the sea may be calm.."
It seems like their main concern is to get the sea back to its original state of rest and calm, so they could continue on their journey to Tarshish, because, as of now, it's anything but calm – it's so tumultuous that they're afraid for their lives.

This is where the comparison between Jonah and The Church takes a turn that's a lot less comfortable than the previous devotions. If we are to go with the assumption that the Lord has sent this Pandemic (that we earlier called a *'tempestillence'*) to wake up and shake up The Church; if perhaps the world somehow discovers that we are the cause for this pandemic, I wonder whether they would ask us the question - "What shall we do to you (The Church) so that this Pandemic would disappear?" Secondly, will they leave the decision to us, The Church, as to how they are to deal with us, or would they make that decision themselves? If they left that decision to us, what might we decide as to their course of action? And if they made the decision themselves, what might they possibly do? I know all these questions are based on probabilities, but they're still worth pondering during this time.

"…For us?"
As is the case with most of us, who consider ourselves the centre of the universe as it were because we are the most important people in our lives, so it was with the sailors too. They were so concerned about themselves that they say to Jonah, *"What shall we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"* Notice the words, *"do to you,"* and the words, *"for us."* They had discovered that Jonah was the reason God sent the pestilence, they were now concerned about how they would survive the ordeal they were facing – their lives mattered more than anything else at that point in time. It wasn't that they were merely concerned about dealing with Jonah,

they were more concerned about getting themselves out of that situation and with that intent were asking Jonah for any ideas he might have.

The world hasn't changed much since then. All of us are still mostly concerned about ourselves and when in a life-threatening situation, most people would place themselves before anybody else. If the situation arises where people have to decide between saving themselves and saving others, most people would choose to save themselves – that's the stark reality that we need to come to grips with. When talking about the signs of the end of the world, Jesus said in **Matthew 24:7-14** – *"For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."* Notice that Jesus said that pestilences are one of the things that are the beginning of sorrows. This pandemic is one such pestilence.

As you read on in the above passage, it says that people would choose themselves over others, hating and betraying one another. The world will still consider themselves over others, just as the sailors did. Let's mentally prepare ourselves for this and not make-believe that this will not happen to The Church. Let's decide to live for Jesus before we decide to die for Him.

"…For the sea was growing more tempestuous."
The reason for their desperation was that, not only was there a terrible tempest – the likes of which they had never seen and understandably so, since the Lord Himself had sent the tempest. But another reason for their desperation could be, that the sea was only growing more tempestuous – it had not reached a climax from which it seemed to be going to descend – it was still on an upward climb.

Things are becoming more challenging for The Church day by day – we're hearing of more people, including Christian leaders getting both infected and succumbing to the virus, thereby creating a void in The Church. This means, there are fewer shepherds to shepherd the flock of God's sheep and that's going to have its effects, both on the local churches as well as on the Global Church.

We don't need to get to the stage where the world begins to question us. We can question ourselves and seek the Lord's forgiveness for our lackadaisical attitude towards Him, towards one another, towards the world around us, and to His calling on our lives individually, and The Church-at-large. Let's remember God's word in **2 Chronicles 7:13-14**, where it reads, *"When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*
Let's seek the Lord with all our heart, and ask Him to transform both our lives and the situation we and the world are in. He is faithful to His word and will be merciful to us and will deliver us.

15 – The First Death Wish

Jonah 1:12: *"And he said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me.'"*

In our previous devotion we saw how the sailors asked Jonah what they should do to him so that the sea would become calm for them. In this devotion, we look at Jonah's response to that question.

"And he said to them, 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea…"
The response by Jonah to the sailors to pick him up and throw him into the sea must have been most unexpected and would have shocked them out of their wits. How would throwing a man overboard solve a problem like a tempestuous sea? Discarding cargo didn't help any, discarding a man couldn't make much of a difference. But Jonah seemed to have a different way of thinking to the sailors. We're not told why Jonah arrived at this solution but let's look at two possible reasons. Firstly, perhaps he thought he was so far gone in his act of rebellion against God that God could not forgive him. In fact it was God Himself who sent the tempest on account of him. So he decided to take the law into his own hands, and he became, not just the culprit but also the judge, pronouncing judgment on himself.

The second possibility is, that this was an act of cowardice – to flee from the situation he had got himself and the sailors in, and to also flee from the call of God on His life, by putting an end to it once and for all.

What options did Jonah have? He could have pleaded with God for mercy and forgiveness, repented and decided to obey the Lord's call. The Lord would have made a way for Him to retrace his steps back to His calling. He could have offered to help the sailors in their efforts to get through the storm. After all, another hand could make a difference, right? But instead He chose death as the way out for himself.

Going by the assumption that this tempest-illence (pandemic) was sent by God to wake up The Church to our call to be a reflection of Him and to make disciples of all nations, what option would we choose to end this crisis? Would we seek God's mercy and pardon and repent of our rebellion against God's call on our lives, or would we decide to continue on in rebellion even if it meant both us and others losing our lives? The Lord is willing to have mercy and deliver us from this pandemic if only we will seek Him whole-heartedly.

With this suggested solution did Jonah have just himself in mind or would this be a solution for the sailors as well? Let's read on.

"…then the sea will become calm for you."
The problem the sailors faced was the raging sea, which destabilised their boat and made making headway impossible, and more seriously, put the ship and the lives of all those on board in jeopardy. If only the sea could be calm again, all would be well again and they could proceed on their journey.

If you look back at the question the mariners asked Jonah, it *was, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" It seemed like a* 'you and us' situation had arisen. They wanted Jonah, to tell them what they should do to him, so that the sea would become calm for them. Notice the *'you and us'* at play in that question. So the answer Jonah gave them was

along the same lines. “Pick me up and throw me into the sea, then the sea will become calm for you.” Notice the ‘you and me’ at play in his response too? Jonah didn’t just have himself in mind with his suggested solution – he also had the sailors and the ship in mind.

Have you noticed, how when we are in a crisis situation – take this pandemic for example - no one but us and our families matter? Other people’s lives and concerns usually take a back seat. Sad as it is, it’s a stark reality of life today. Praise God for exceptions to this rule, where loving people are concerned for theirs and others’ lives as well, and they do all they can to help people in need. This is the best proof of selfless, sacrificial love of God. Those who make decisions to share love in this way stand as great testimonies of God’s divine love).

During this pandemic, are we in a similar situation, where it’s a ‘you and us’ game at play? Are we concerned about none other than ourselves and our families? Do we want a solution for our problem, even if it’s at another’s expense? Or are we concerned for both ourselves and others as well? Are we going out of our way to help those in need? Let’s remember that the world is watching us during these times and every demonstration of divine love is noticed and will impact their lives. Theodore Roosevelt said it beautifully, when he said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Let’s remember that at the end of the day, it’s love that impacts lives – not programmes and projects – these only serve as vehicles to express love. It’s only God’s love demonstrated through us, The Church that can transform lives of people, just like it transformed ours.

What might it take for this tempest-illence (pandemic) to go away? Would it mean that we The Church would need to be plunged into persecution for there to be a calm in the world? Is that what Jesus talked about in **Matthew 24:1-31**, where He foretold that The Church would go through a great tribulation, the likes of which were never seen before and would never be seen thereafter? **(Matthew 24:.21)**

“…For I know that this great tempest is because of me.”
Jonah goes on to be quite explicit about the acknowledgment of the fact that he was responsible for the tempest they were facing. He says, *“For I know that this tempest is because of me.”* We must appreciate the honesty of Jonah here. He did not try to deny the fact that he was responsible, he did not downplay the drawing of lots that led to him being discovered as the culprit – he willingly acknowledged his wrong doing to the mariners.

When we are confronted with an issue we might be guilty of, what’s our response? Do we deny our wrongdoing, do we blame others, do we justify ourselves, or do we accept our wrong doing. **Proverbs 28:13** says, *“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”*

If we The Church are the cause for this pandemic, what’s our response going to be? Will we deny, will we blame, will we justify or will we acknowledge, repent and seek God for mercy? Let’s decide to do just that, knowing that our God is merciful and willing to forgive and turn things around. It’s not worth continuing on as if nothing’s amiss – it can be detrimental to both ourselves The Church and to the world around as well.

16 – The Futile Effort

Jonah 1:13 – *"Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them."*

Nevertheless
The word, *'nevertheless,'* gives us a glimpse that they are going to pursue something other than what Jonah had suggested. The option Jonah had given them was an easy thing to do from a physical stand point, but it was neither a reasonable nor a humane option to follow through with. He had suggested that they pick him up and throw him into the sea; then the sea would become calm for them. This did not seem like something they could find themselves doing – taking the life of one person to save their own lives. It would take a real hard and selfish heart to jump to such a suggestion.

We're going through very difficult times across the globe at present, with many people being infected with this virus and many also losing their lives and losing loved ones. In such times, the most important person to anyone is oneself – everybody else takes the back seat. Many doctors and health care workers are risking their lives for the noble and selfless task of saving the lives of others. Many of us don't realise the risks they take to help save lives. (There are however some doctors who choose to quit practicing at this present time, so as to save their own lives). These workers are like the sailors in our story who are putting their lives on the line to protect the lives of other people. In the case of the sailors, the word, 'nevertheless,' indicates that they are not willing to take Jonah's advice, (though he's the one who put them in that hazardous situation), but instead are willing to do all it takes to protect both their lives and his.

What about us The Church? How are we faring when it comes to taking care of the needs of those around us? Are we going out of our way to help people during this crisis? Are we helping, serving, giving, sharing with those in need in whatever capacity possible? Or are we concerned about none but ourselves? Let's learn from the sailors to consider the lives of other people as important as our own lives. In fact, these words of Jesus in Matthew 7:12 are often referred to as the golden rule. "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." Jesus also said, in **Matthew 22:37-40**: *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."* Most of us do a great job of loving ourselves, but the problem we struggle with is loving our neighbours as we love ourselves.

The men rowed hard to return to land but they could not
Let's look beyond the word, 'nevertheless' in this situation. Not only did the sailors decide against doing something (taking Jonah's advice and throwing him overboard to die), but they also decided for something. Very often, when we decide against something, we are also consciously or unconsciously deciding for something else. It's not wise to merely be against something without deciding for something else. In this case, the sailors were going against Jonah's advice, and instead they were working on their own plan instead. They rowed hard to return to land. It's these words, 'rowed hard,' that give us a clue about the kind of ship they were travelling on – it wasn't a steam ship as they would not have had steam boats back then. It was a ship that was rowed by men. One can imagine the difficulty they faced fighting a losing battle against a tempest sent by God Himself.

They had come to a point in their struggle where they knew that they were making no headway and that the only solution available to them was to head back to land and that's what they began to pursue at that point. But the harder they tried, the more difficult it seemed. When we're up against God, it doesn't matter how skilled, knowledgeable or experienced we are, there's no way we can win a battle against Him. Though the sailors could see a glimpse of the power of God at work in the tempest, they did not know the enormity of God's power, and they continued to struggle, not just against the winds and the waves, but against Him. This reminds me of **Genesis 32**, where Jacob wrestled with an angel of God in for a whole night. There was no way he could overcome an angel, but still he tried.

One needs to know when to quit fighting. It's certainly a good thing to persevere under trials and not quit struggling, but there are battles in life where it's pointless fighting a battle where you're overpowered and defeat stares you in the face.

As The Church, there are certain battles that we as God's people should not even get into as it defeats our purpose of God's representatives on earth. We were called to love, not hate, to unite, not divide, to reconcile, not split and yet so often so much of our time and energy is spent on things the world pursues and we wonder why we aren't winning these battles. It's because they were never meant to be fought in the first place.

"…For the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them."
Here's the reason why they decided to quit on their struggle – the sea was neither just tempestuous, nor was it growing less tempestuous, but instead it was growing more tempestuous. And not only was it growing more tempestuous, but it was growing more tempestuous against them. This was now a battle of wind and waves against man, not wind and waves against ship. And they must have been experienced sailors, to know to call it quits and try to head back to shore, but the problem was, as hard as they tried, they were making no headway.

When troubles come, it's difficult enough and we begin our struggle to overcome them, but when troubles come one after another, it becomes increasingly difficult to continue on in the struggle. It can sometimes feel like the whole world is against us.

In the case of the sailors, they knew that the tempest was from God, they knew that Jonah was the cause for it, they had heard from Jonah himself of a possible solution, but they were not willing to follow through with all that they knew.

So often in life, we The Church know a lot about what we need to do, how to do it and even when to do it, but the problem we face is that we don't have the resolve enough to follow through with our decision, and that stands in the way of us accomplishing what we are supposed to and capable of.

Let's seek the Lord for His enabling power to follow through with obeying His word to love Him and love our neighbour as we love ourselves – that's the crux of the whole matter of what we're about in life. In fact, that's a description of the overall purpose of our life as The Church-at-large. The Lord is willing to empower us when we are willing to obey, but we can be assured of the Lord's loving discipline if we choose to stand in His way of accomplishing what He chooses to, in and through us The Church. And when He stands in our way, it doesn't matter who is with us or who is for us – we'll be fighting a losing battle.

This pandemic is proving in more ways than one as a time of the Lord's refining of His Church across the globe. We have rebelled against His call on our lives to make disciples of all nations and we're facing a God-sent crisis. We can continue on in our fight against God, or we can call it quits on the struggle and repent of our sin of rebellion and get back to our calling before God decides to go one step further in His discipline of us.

17 – The Prayer for Mercy

Jonah 1:14 – *"Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You."*

"Therefore they cried out to the LORD…"

In our last devotion we saw how despite Jonah suggesting to the sailors that they throw him into the sea so that the sea would become calm for them, they struggled to row to shore and were unable to, as the sea became more tempestuous. We must admire their concern for Jonah in wanting to save his life and continuing to risk all their lives in the process.

Now it seems like they have no other option but to take Jonah's advice to throw him into the sea. But before they do that they do something that seems quite strange to us who read the story, and must have been to Jonah as well. They decided to pray to the God of Jonah. We must remember that these men were not Jews and so did not worship the God of the Jews, they had their own so-called gods that they worshipped. But here they are clearly praying to the Lord, which is the God of the Jews.

When we ponder this fact of them praying to the Lord, it's evident that they had come to believe in the Lord and there are two obvious reasons for this happening. The first being that that they seemed to know that the tempest was caused by God and was no ordinary tempest. The second factor that pointed them to the Lord was when they discovered that Jonah was fleeing from the Lord and so the Lord had sent the tempest on the sea. This must have been a terrifying revelation to them about who God is. If God could do something so terrible to get at one man, He must be an awesome and yet personal God.

Unconsciously, Jonah had been instrumental in leading a few men to the knowledge of God, and that without doing any preaching. Strangely, he was supposed to be fleeing from exactly this – preaching and here, without preaching, he is seeing people come to know the Lord. Is that not amazing to see how the Lord can reveal Himself to people, if He chooses to?

When we look at the ways the Lord is working in the world today, it's amazing to see how many people from non-Christian backgrounds are testifying to how the Lord is revealing Himself to them in visions and dreams, without anyone ever talking to them about Jesus. It's clear that if we The Church fail to do what we were called and chosen to do – to make disciples of all nations, the Lord can do it on His own, but the sobering reality is that we will be held accountable for not fulfilling our purpose for living.

"…and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life…"

When they prayed, they asked two things of the Lord - let's look at the first thing they asked of the Lord. They asked the Lord to not let them perish on account of Jonah's life. They thought (as would any of us have), that Jonah would die if he were thrown into the raging waters, because even the best of swimmers could never survive such raging waters. So they asked the Lord to not let them perish when they threw Jonah into the sea. Despite the fact that they believed what Jonah told them - that if they threw him into the sea, the sea would become calm for them, they were now gripped with another fear – would God avenge the life of Jonah by taking their lives? Suddenly their lives seem more important to them than Jonah's life.

It seems obvious that they possess a strong sense of justice. They know that if they take a life, they would have to pay with life, and hence that prayer to the Lord for mercy. From their plea to God for mercy and spare their lives, it's also evident that they seem to have an understanding that the Lord is merciful. How they arrived at that understanding of the Lord we do not know but that seems to be evident from their prayer.

The world hears us talk a lot about the love of God, but do they hear us talk about God's justice and mercy? We need to be careful that we are giving the world the right understanding of God. And the best possible way we can communicate the attributes of God, is if we demonstrate them in our own lives. Do we demonstrate justice in our everyday lives? Do we have a strong sense of right and wrong or are we vague about demarcating between the two, so as to be accommodative? Do we demonstrate divine love in all of our relationships or is our love no different from that of the world – conditional, biased, with strings attached? Do we show mercy to those who wrong us or do we wait for the first possible chance to get back at them and take revenge? Many times, we are the greatest message we give the world about God.

"and do not charge us with innocent blood…"

The second thing they ask of the Lord is that He doesn't charge them with killing an innocent man. They realise that there's no reason why they should take Jonah's life, except the reason that Jonah himself gave them – that the sea would become calm for them if they did this. As unreasonable and heartless as it sounds, they've decided to do just that and are pleading to God for mercy on them before going ahead with it.

Here again we see their strong sense of justice – a man should not die for no reason. They recognise Jonah as an innocent man. In fact in their eyes, there's nothing that Jonah is guilty of. The only thing he seems to be guilty of is something that he himself confesses to them – fleeing from God. How one man's disobedience to God can cause a storm on the sea is something that they would never have heard of in their lives before. But apart from this confession by Jonah, he was an innocent man and was certainly not deserving of death.

This reminds me of another person who was absolutely innocent and not deserving of death except that He claimed to be who He really was – the Son of God. Jesus was not guilty of any sin and Pilate and Herod knew that too; in fact that's the reason Pilate washed his hands and said, *"I am innocent of the blood of this just person."* **(Matthew 27:24)**. Pilate recognised Jesus as a just person and not deserving of death but he could not prevail against the crowd and so washed his hands claiming that he was innocent of taking Jesus' life.

"…for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You."

After making these two requests to the Lord, they then acknowledge the fact that God was behind what they were about to do. God's messenger had given them this idea to thrown him into the sea, and they were merely carrying it out. Isn't that an amazing interpretation of the situation? They realise that God is behind this whole situation they are in and they are merely instruments in the hands of God to accomplish what He intended for Jonah. As far as they are concerned they think that it would be the end of Jonah's life for being rebellious against God.

As we ponder this portion of the story of Jonah and as we make comparisons with The Church-at-large, we need to ask ourselves a serious question. If God has sent this global pandemic on the world on account of us The Church, because we have failed to fulfil our purpose for

existence as His messengers – to take the Gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations, is it possible that we will be plunged into great tribulation? Will God permit the world to persecute us, and will the Lord use this to get our attention and to get us back on track? If God could do that to Jonah, there's no reason why He can't do the same to us The Church as well. After all, there's a whole world of people whose eternity is at stake, and we The Church to a large extent are taking it rather easy and are busy going about our own lives and businesses, and neglecting the purposes for which we were saved in the first place.

Jesus said in **Matthew 24:9-10** - *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another."* It's clear from Jesus's words that He's referring to The Church going through a time of tribulation. Notice the word, 'you,' is used three times in those verses and the words, 'one another,' is used twice. Both *'you'* and *'one another'* refer to the believers. Jesus says that believers will be killed, will be hated by all nations for His name's sake, many will be offended, many will be betrayed by fellow believers, many believers will be hated by other believers. Let's do all we can while we can before the time comes when we can't do as much as we're doing now to make the Gospel known to the world around.

Let's take stock of our lives, seek the Lord, repent and get back to God and get about being and doing all that we were called to, before it's too late, because if we let these moments of God's patience pass us by, chances are we will live to see the days Jesus talked about.

18 – The Mighty Calm

Jonah 1:15-16 – *"Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him."*

"Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard…"

We've already seen how hesitant the sailors were to follow Jonah's advice to throw him into the sea so that the sea would become calm for them. They instead tried desperately to row to shore, but the sea grew more tempestuous. These sailors seemed to be kind men who, though were willing to dispose of their cargo in the sea, were hesitant to take a man's life to save their own lives. But when they were making no headway, they eventually decided to follow Jonah's advice. In our previous devotion, we saw how they prayed to the Lord, asking that He not hold it against them for taking the life of an innocent man.

But now they go ahead with their decision, take Jonah and throw him overboard into the raging waters. That was perhaps something they would never have done in all their years as sailors. It didn't even sound reasonable – how could throwing one man overboard calm a raging sea?

In our world today, people sometimes find it easier to dispose of people for the sake of gaining wealth for themselves and sadly, even if it means disposing of their own loved ones. That's the sad state of affairs of the world we live in.

What about us The Church? What do we value in life? Do we value people over things or things over people? That's a question each of us must ask ourselves, and honestly answer. One thing is very clear about the God we worship – for Him, people matter far more than things. He was willing to sacrifice His own Son to save us from a lost eternity.

An often-overlooked story from the times when Jesus walked the earth, is when He went to the country of the Gadarenes and delivered a man from demon-possession. We are familiar with that story, but if we look deeper into that story, we'll find a big difference between what man values, and what God values. Jesus was willing to let the owner of the pigs lose several hundred thousand rupees (or dollars etc.) to save one man, whom no one considered of any earthly value, while the keepers of the pigs and the people of the town had so much value for the money they had lost, that they asked Jesus to leave their region immediately. That's a little glimpse of what we as humans hold dear to our hearts and what God holds dear to His heart.

Getting rid of Jonah from the ship brings to mind another incident from the times of the Exodus of the Israelites, in **Joshua Chapter 7** when Achan, had disobeyed God and taken and hidden some of the spoil (a robe, silver and gold) from the defeat at Jericho. He was responsible for a defeat the Israelites immediately suffered in the battle at Ai, and he had to be killed along with his entire family so that the rest of the people didn't suffer further.

Like Jonah was responsible for the tempest, are we The Church responsible for this pandemic that both we are the world are experiencing? Have we become so consumed with things, going so far as to believe that Godliness is a means to financial gain? This is in total contrast to Paul's teaching in **1 Timothy 6:5**, where he taught against such thinking. If this is the condition of us The Church, then perhaps we are in danger of being disposed of, for a period so as to bring a

calm to the world around and also to lead us to repentance – to God and to our call to take His word to the world.

"…And the raging sea grew calm…"

When they threw Jonah into the sea, something amazing happened. The raging sea that caused immense fear of death, anxiety, loss of cargo, and even threatened the structure of the ship was suddenly as calm as if there had been no storm. The words, *"the sea grew calm,"* doesn't just indicate that the winds died down, but says a lot more. It says that the raging waves caused by the winds also calmed down. It's not an easy thing to bring a calm to raging waters. Even if the winds ceased immediately, the raging would continue for a while, but here we find that the sea grew calm immediately – indicating that the calming of the sea was an act of God Himself. Does this not remind us of the times when Jesus calmed storms, thereby proving to His disciples that He was indeed God, and had control over nature?

"…At this the men greatly feared the Lord…"

On seeing the sea become so calm, one would imagine that the reaction of the sailors would have been one of joy and jubilation, but it was one of great fear. They were now filled with another fear – not the fear of the tempest, not the fear of losing their ship and cargo, not the fear of death, but they were filled with the fear of God. They had never known this fear in their lives because they had never encountered the one true God. They revered and worshipped the Lord. The Lord used this tempest to do two things, if not more – He took care of Jonah's rebellion and He even revealed Himself to non-Jewish people.

Isn't it amazing to know that if the Lord chose to, He could reveal Himself to the entire world in a million ways, so that they come to believe in Him, but instead He chooses to use us The Church to reveal Him to the world. He expects us to reveal Him to the world by our lives, our love, by our unity as the Body of Christ and by the preaching of the Gospel? What a privilege we have as believers and as children of God, but how sad it is that most people in The Church do not even consider this as part of their life's calling and instead live as if they were no different from the world around.

As if to remind us that if we don't do our job, the Lord can do it without us, we hear stories of people in many countries who see visions of Jesus and have dreams of Him and have come to faith in Him as a result, and that, with no prior information of Jesus at all. Let's not take too much comfort in the words that someone said, "Without God, we cannot, without us God will not," because God can work without us – He used a donkey to speak to a man, He used ravens to feed His prophet, Elijah. Jesus told the Pharisees (who told Him to rebuke the whole multitude of disciples who were rejoicing and praising God for all the mighty works they had seen through Him), that if the disciples kept silent, then the stones would cry out. God can use anyone or anything to do what he wants to do, so let's choose to be used by Him, and not remain silent. God chose to give us the privilege to partner with Him in making disciples of all nations, so let's do that with all we've got for as long as we live.

"…And they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him."

Not only were the sailors filled with great fear for the Lord, but they went one step further and worshipped Him by sacrificing to Him and making vows to Him. This is an amazing twist to the story – a twist that no one saw coming. One moment, there's a life-threatening tempest

that's drained the sailors of any hope they had in living, let alone making the journey, and the next moment, they are worshipping the God of the universe by offering a sacrifice to Him and making vows to Him.

A grateful heart always results in worship of, and service to God. Remember one of the nine men who were cleansed of leprosy, who came back instead of going and showing himself to the priest as Jesus had told him to? He was filled with gratitude and decided that expressing his gratitude was of paramount importance to him. Jesus commended him for this attitude of gratitude.

The apostle Paul reminds us in **Romans 12:1**, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."* Paul is reminding us that since God has been so merciful to us in that He saved us from a lost eternity, we need to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God and he goes on to say that this is our reasonable service, meaning that this should be our natural response to such love, grace, and mercy. To not be grateful is to be unthankful and unappreciative of God's love. Our obedience, love, and service to God is directly proportional to our gratitude to Him for all He's done and does in our lives.

What about us The Church? Are we thankful to the Lord for all He has done and continues to do in our lives, or have we reached a point of total indifference where God doesn't really matter to us anymore? Has God become so familiar to us that we are no longer thankful to Him? Or have we gone to the other extreme, like the people of Israel in the wilderness, who grumbled against God because they had no water and meat? Let's take warning from their lives because many lost their lives as a result.

If we stop and ponder on the blessings we've received and continue to receive from the Lord, (including the breath we have to live and read this devotion), we will be amazed to realise that we have so much to be thankful for. Let's be reminded of the old song which says, "Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done."

19 – The Fishy Rescue

Jonah 1:16 – *"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."*

Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah
We just saw how the sailors made a tough, never-before-done decision – to throw a man overboard. We also saw how, when Jonah was thrown overboard, the sea calmed down and they, in response made sacrifices to the Lord and took vows. Just when the story seems to take a terrible turn and hints at the end of Jonah's life, something amazing happens, and this time again, it's the Lord who's responsible for what happens.

We don't know how deep Jonah sank into the waters before the Lord intervened, but it could not have been too deep, lest he would have run out of breath. The Lord intervened at the perfect time and did what seems scientifically impossible – it can still not be explained. In fact, it's the unexplainable that we call miracles, don't we? The verse says, "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah." Did the Lord create a special fish just for this purpose? Was there a fish that could swallow a human whole back then, that got extinct or was the swallowing a miracle? We don't know for sure, but one thing is clear – the Lord was behind it. The same Lord who was responsible for bringing the storm on the Mediterranean Sea was now responsible for Jonah being rescued. What justice and love of God at play in one story and in so short a span of time.

At first reading or hearing of this story, it doesn't sound like this was a good act of God to prepare a fish to swallow Jonah, because there's nothing positive-sounding about a man being swallowed by a fish – it sounds like it's the end of him for good. And that perhaps would have been how the story would have been understood, but let's read on.

And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights
These words paint an unbelievable picture that the life of Jonah is not over yet – it's continuing, for at least another three days and three nights, though in a very strange place – in the belly of a big fish. We've never heard of anyone else, apart from Jonah, spending three days and three nights in the belly of a fish. One would imagine that one's life would end right in the mouth of a fish, not continue on in the belly, and by no means for three days and three nights. Just imagine that for a moment if it's at all possible to do so. Jonah rolling around in the belly of the fish, with other ingested food matter, floating in stomach juices and yet staying alive for so long. I'm sure the fish wasn't stationary, it was moving constantly, as is wont of fish to do. This is a case of a man being in a living submarine as it were.

Despite what Jonah thought about his life's mission, purpose, and duration, despite what the sailors thought would happen to Jonah when they threw him into the sea, it does not seem like the Lord thought Jonah's life's mission and purpose was over yet – he had a lot to become and a lot do as well.

Isn't it the same with us at times? We might feel like we are the end of the road like we've fulfilled our life's purpose and we are ready to go home, but then the Lord does something to let us know that He's not done with us yet – He still has plans for us – to become and to accomplish in His service, and until that's done, we're going to be around, and He'll do anything to keep us around – even if He has to do a miracle on our behalf.

What about us The Church? Have we become all that the Lord intended for us to become when He established The Church 2000 years ago? Have we accomplished all that He intended for us to? Though the answer is obviously a resounding, "Not yet," let's remember that the Lord is not done with us yet? Absolutely not. God does not give up on people – people give up on people; and sadly, people give up on God, but God never gives up on people. Thank God He does not give up on people, because I wouldn't be around to write this devotion today, had He given up on me.

The Lord will, in love chastise us His Church, so as to get us back on track of becoming and fulfilling all that He desired for us when He called and chose us, and that, perhaps is what we are facing now and will face to a greater degree soon when we go through the Great Tribulation. But let's never for one moment think that we're done for. Purifying is not destroying. It's not the fire of destruction that we will go through, but the fire of purification. Just like gold, it goes through the fire, not to destroy it, but to rather purify it.

Another three days and three nights

The words, *'three days and three nights,'* reminds us of another person who spent three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, but came back to life and that for a most amazing reason. I'm sure you've guessed I'm talking about Jesus, who said, *"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* Jesus did not spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth because of any rebellion on His part – but instead, it was because He was being sacrificial and taking our place. Not only did He die on the cross in our place – we should have died because of our sins, but not only did He take our place and die in our stead, but He also went down into the heart of the earth on our behalf, and saved us the eternal agony of ending up there. Our sins paved the way for us to go down to hell, but Jesus out of love for us humans took our place on the cross and in the heart of the earth and gave us the option to choose life instead.

Those of us who have chosen life know what a beautiful life we have – all because Jesus bore the penalty of our sins. Those of us who have not yet come to know this amazing life have an opportunity to do so. All you need to do is to believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins – which is death. Though that sounds like a sad ending, the truth is that He arose from the dead and is alive forever more. He is willing to change your life forever – to forgive your sins, to give you freedom from the bondage or slavery to sin, and to enable us to live a new life. He does this by giving us His Holy Spirit to live inside of us to help us live this new life.

Jonah remained alive for those three days and three nights – that's the amazing part of this story. When God wants to keep someone alive, no one can stop Him, and that was the case with Jonah.

The Church is going to go into a time like Jonah did – a time of tribulation, but also a time of rescuing, where the Lord will not let us get consumed by the tribulation. It will be a time of testing, trying, and refining. Jesus foretold about these trying times in Matthew 24:9-14. (Please take time to read this passage). One thing we can be sure of during the difficult times we go through as The Church – the Lord will be with us and as Jesus said, *"I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."* **(Matthew 16:18)**. No one and nothing can destroy God's Church – that's the greatest comfort we have. Let's live with this comforting thought and let's also die with it.

20 – The Deep Prayer

Jonah 2:1-9 – *"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. 2 And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. 3 For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me. 4 Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.' 5 The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. 6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God. 7 "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple. 8 "Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy. 9 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD."*

"Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly."
It's very interesting that the text says, "Then Jonah prayed…" This gives us an impression that after spending three days and three nights in the belly of the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord. One can't imagine all that Jonah went through during those three days and three nights, alone and in a very strange place. Not only was Jonah conscious physically and mentally, but he was also conscious of the fact that he had been swallowed whole by a big fish. What an eventful few hours Jonah has just had with the tempest, and it then gets even more eventful with a once-in-the-history-of-the-world-incident. Through it all, Jonah seemed quite adamant and rebellious in spirit it appears. Was he hoping he'd get digested and the ordeal with God would be over once and for all? It's obvious he could not sit, stand, or lie restful while in the belly of the fish, but he remained obstinate for three days and three nights nonetheless.

Then he begins praying to the Lord, from the most amazing of all prayer rooms ever. It's at a dark constantly changing location and depth, where he's surrounded by stomach juices and weeds, reaching depths of the earth that no human would ever have been to, which he refers to as the moorings of the mountains. This prayer room is a living submarine as it were, with no windows through which to peek outside though.

"And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, and He answered me. "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice."
We now get a glimpse of the prayer that Jonah prayed to the Lord. The first thing he says is that he cried out to the Lord because of his affliction. Isn't that one of the most common reasons why we cry out to the Lord today as well? When things go well, most of us forget about God and live our lives as if we didn't need Him at all, but when troubles come our way, and after we've made futile attempts at rescuing ourselves, we then turn to God for help.

The next thing we hear from Jonah is the fact that when He cried out to the Lord out of his affliction, the Lord answered him. What an assurance we have even today, knowing that when we cry out to the Lord, He answers us and doesn't keep us guessing or waiting indefinitely for an answer. He says to the Lord, "Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice." The Hebrews believed that Sheol was the place the dead go to and he refers to himself as being in Sheol, which means he saw himself as good as dead and must have been wondering what he was doing staying alive. When he cried out to the Lord from a place as good as dead, the Lord heard his voice – what a comforting thought to some of us who might be going through

situations right now where we feel we're as good as dead – the Lord is able to hear us, if only we are willing to cry out to Him.

Even as The Church at large, we could be feeling the same way at present – like we are in a dark place, restless, not knowing what to do with this never disappearing global pandemic. Some people have even come to the point of frustration and desperation and have even lost the will to live. But even in those times, the Lord is able to hear us, if we are willing to cry out to Him.

For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me.
Jonah goes on to say to the Lord that it was He who threw him into the sea. He doesn't attribute his being in the sea to the sailors, but rather to God. This means that he was implying that God had a hand in the casting of the lots so that it fell on him. Jonah knew the Lord enough to know that if the Lord wanted to do something, no one and nothing could get in His way and he could use strange methods of seeking guidance, He could use unbelieving men to carry out his purposes so as to accomplish what He would have accomplished through His people.

The same is true of us The Church today as well. If we don't do what we were called and chosen to do, the Lord can do whatever it takes to remind us of our calling and purpose in life – even if it means casting us away for a season or letting us go through a time of persecution. It's for this reason that I've been alluding to the fact that this global pandemic has been sent by the Lord Himself to wake up us The Church from our slumber.

Jonah referred to himself being in the deep, at the heart of the earth, where he was surrounded by water as if by a flood and billows and waves passed over him. Though he could not see all these things, he was quite aware of them at the time. That must not have been a good feeling for Jonah to be experiencing – far from any help of any kind. The sad thing is that even if the fish were passing near another ship or near the shore, no one would have ever dreamt that there was a human being inside a fish crying out for help. How was he going to be rescued now? He was praying to the God of the Universe who was capable of whipping up a tempest that was not humanly manageable, causing a fish to swallow him whole, but could the Lord now answer his prayer?

Then I said, 'I have been cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.
Jonah goes on to tell the Lord that he has been cast out of His sight. Though an impossibility as no one and nothing can be hidden from God's sight that perhaps was how Jonah was feeling at the moment. Isn't that how we feel at times in our own lives? Not only does it feels like we've been completely deserted by all those close to us, but the worst part is that we sometimes feel like we've been deserted by God Himself. Impossible as it is, as God will never leave us nor forsake us, the circumstances we are sometimes in cause us to feel this way.

But in the same breath when Jonah feels cast out from God's sight, he quickly makes a decision to look again toward God's holy temple. The Jews had the habit of looking towards Jerusalem while praying, but this was not what he was referring to when he said, "I will look again toward your holy temple," because given the circumstance he was in at the time, there was no way to tell which direction was Jerusalem as he had no point of reference from within the belly of the fish. What he was referring to was heaven, where God Himself dwells forever. Praise God that we don't need to look toward any city to pray to God anymore, because God no longer reveals

His glory in temples or buildings made by man, but dwells in heaven and we have access to Him through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, whose atoning death on our behalf tore the veil, thereby giving us access to God through Him.

The wonderful thing about Jonah at that point of time was that he made a decision to get back to God, and when we go through a crisis, that's the best thing we can do – get back to God, or get closer to God. The worst thing one could ever do in a crisis situation is to walk away from God, because He is the only one who can help us when no one else can.

The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head.
Jonah goes on to explain what he was feeling and experiencing. He felt like his entire soul was being drowned; that's not a good feeling to have, when you begin to lose all hope and determination to carry on. However strong a person might be, when the person begins to lose hope and begins to quit, then defeat is inevitable. He says that the deep closed in around him – another term to refer to the deep sea burying him alive. He adds a physical detail as well. All the weeds that the fish was consuming was getting wrapped around his head and would have made it a lot more difficult for him than it already was.

Sometimes, we individuals, and as The Church at large, we can go through difficulties that seem to suggest that we are fighting a losing battle and quitting seems like the only solution. Discomfort adds to discomfort and fighting for survival becomes less of a fight and more of a surrender.

I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me forever; yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.
Jonah goes on to give more vivid details that he could have only known by God revealing them to him as there was no way he could have known these details from the inside of the fish. He says that he went down to the moorings of the mountains, meaning the very base of the mountains at the bottom of the sea. It seemed like he was being imprisoned behind the bars of the earth as it were and not only so, but he adds another heart-gripping detail – the word, 'forever.' To have to go through difficulties and see light at the end of the tunnel is one thing, but to get the feeling like it's going to be forever, is a feeling that can be really disheartening. But once again, while providing these depressing details, he speaks words of faith and hope of God's deliverance from his predicament. He refers to himself being in the pit – perhaps referring to hell itself. He then refers to God as *"O Lord, my God."* A beautiful reference to God and one that's really important when one is going through difficult times, because it's only when God becomes our Lord and our God can any real lasting change take place in one's life. The fact that God is God of the Universe means nothing to me, unless and until He becomes the Lord of my life.

When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple.
Jonah goes on to say that when his soul fainted – when we was losing all hope of survival, he did something that made all the difference between victory and defeat – he remembered the Lord. As was mentioned earlier, the one person who can make a difference in impossible situations is God Himself, but in those difficult, impossible situations, if we don't choose to remember the Lord, then we are choosing to ignore His ability to help. When he uses the words "remembered the Lord," he's not using it to mean that he had forgotten the Lord until then, but

rather to mean that he then chose to acknowledge God as the Lord of his life and the one who could make a difference to his situation and so to seek His help.

He then addresses God and says that his prayer went up to God and he adds another detail – into your holy temple. He's making a reference again to heaven, where God dwells forever. Isn't it amazing that prayers by mere mortal human beings like us can reach into the very presence of God? Should that not be a motivating thought to cause us to pray more to the Lord, knowing that He hears, answers and can make a difference to our impossible situations?

Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy.
Jonah suddenly makes a reference to people who don't know this amazing God and says that those who regard or worship idols, forsake the mercy of God that they could otherwise experience. He refers to the idols as worthless, since they are inanimate and cannot hear, see, think, feel or do anything to help us in our situations.

When he uses the words, *'forsake their own mercy,'* he is perhaps referring to the mercy he believes he is about to receive from God when God delivers him from the belly of the fish. He seems to be saying that since he believes in the one true God, he is sure of experiencing God's mercy in response to his prayer to God and in the same breath seems to be saying that those who don't worship God but who rather worship idols don't experience this amazing aspect of God's nature – mercy. By not experiencing mercy is to experience judgment because they have rejected the Creator of the universe and instead chosen to worship His creation instead. By forsaking God's mercy, one is choosing God's wrath instead.

But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.
After referring to those who worship idols and who forsake God's mercy he then mentions what he would do in contrast to them. He would use his voice as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Wow – this seems like a real turn around. The prophet who rebelled against going and speaking to the people of Nineveh has now determined that he would use his voice to do just that. Not only does he decide to do that, but also mentions the motivating factor behind it. In anticipation of receiving God's mercy for his rebellion against God, he is also anticipating living a life of gratitude – hence the words, 'voice of thanksgiving.' This means that his decision to obey God and take the message to Nineveh is not the result of fear of God's punishment anymore but rather as a result of a heart filled with thanksgiving for all God had done for his those three days.

This reminds of another passage in **Romans 12:1**, where the apostle Paul said, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your [b]reasonable service."* Here too, Paul is asking the Roman believers (and us as well), to not forget how merciful God has been to them (as explained in the first 11 chapters) and to instead to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God and then he goes on to say that this is our reasonable service, meaning that a life of grateful service is the reasonable response to such mercy of God on our lives. We don't need to live and serve God, out of fear of wrath, but rather out of a heart of gratitude for all He has done to save us from a lost eternity.

Jonah experienced the mercy of God by being 3 days and three nights in the belly of the fish and every one of us who have come to faith in Jesus have experience God's mercy by Jesus spending three days and three nights in the heart of the earth on our behalf. He took the

punishment we should have taken so we could be set free to live a new life of love. Does this not deserve our whole hearted gratitude?

I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.
Jonah goes on to say that he will pray what he had vowed. How often have we heard either ourselves or others say that if God delivered us out of a situation we would do something out of a heart of gratitude for his intervention? This seems to be the case with Jonah as well. Perhaps he had told the Lord that if he was delivered then he would go ahead with God's call on his life to take the message to Nineveh.

He ends with the most powerful statement in that prayer – Salvation is of the Lord. Though Jonah was referring both himself being saved by God in that situation, he was also referring to the fact that if one is to be saved from sin and it's penalty, which was death, no human, no animal, no idol, no philosophy or anything else could ever do that – only God's own Son, our Lord Jesus could do that. Similar words are reflected in Acts 4:12 - Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Let's never forget that and let's make this truth known to the world around, as that's the purpose for our existence.

As The Church, let's make a decision even during this global pandemic, even before we are delivered from it, that we will take God's word to the world; that we will 'make disciples of all nations,' as the Lord asked us to do. And once we are delivered let's do just that, because as Jonah rightly said, *"Salvation is of the Lord."*

21 – The Divine Deliverance

Jonah 2:10 – *"So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*

"So the Lord spoke to the fish"
The words, *"So the Lord spoke to the fish,"* might seem fairy tale-like or present day cartoon movie-like where people speak with and have relationships with animals, birds or fish, but this is neither a fairy tale, nor is it a cartoon movie. It is the God who created the universe and every living being in it (including the fish), commanding His creation to do something on behalf of the crown of His creation – mankind.

It's only humans that can have a relationship with God, as it was only humans who were created in the image of God - in His likeness, to reflect His character / nature. Animals, birds, reptiles and fish were not created in God's image, and therefore cannot have a relationship with God. Also, it's only humans who possess a soul that lives on for eternity. And it's this fact about humans that not only sets us apart from all of God's creation, but it's also what makes us so special to God – special enough that he would come down in the form of a human to save our souls from a lost eternity.

If God chooses to speak to any other part of his creation, animals, birds, sun, rain, wind etc. and command it to do what He desires, He can do that, but as in this case, it's always on behalf of His people that God does this and not for no reason. Remember the parting of the Red Sea, Balaam and the donkey, the ravens that fed Elijah, the rain that God withheld and then sent during the time of Elijah, the sun that stood still during the days of Joshua, Daniel in the lions' den, the winds and the waves that were calmed on several occasions during Jesus' time on earth, the sun that stopped shining during Jesus' crucifixion and more. All these were done by God and on behalf of humans. In this case too, we see God speaking to the fish, on behalf of a human named Jonah, but not only on account of Jonah, but eventually for the people of Nineveh and for us The Church as well, who have been and still are learning from his story.

Another interesting thing to take note of is that when God intervened in such supernatural ways, it wasn't just to protect His people or to give them a sign, but so that His people would be a blessing to the whole world. When God parted the Red Sea, it was to save His people, the Jews, who would then be His vehicle instruments, through whom His Son Jesus would come into the world, so that the whole world had a chance to be saved. When the sun stopped shining during Jesus' crucifixion, it was a clear sign to all the world that Jesus was the Son of God who had come to bring Salvation to the whole world. Let's always remember that the Lord is not a magician to do things to impress people, but rather He is willing to do the impossible so that we can be His channels of hope to a world desperately in need of hope.

We The Church can recount countless instances in our own lives where the Lord intervened in supernatural ways to provide, protect or guide us, and if we look at the bigger picture we'll realise that the Lord was doing something in our individual lives so that together we as The Church will be a witness to the world around of the amazingly loving, powerful, just, holy God we worship, and so we might invite them to belong to this amazing family. It was never for us alone that the Lord did what He did – He was doing it in and through us so that the world will be blessed. Let's never forget this bigger picture of God's plan for not just our lives, but for the whole world as well.

"…And it vomited Jonah..."

When God speaks, His creation obeys – all but humans though. If you noticed from the above instances of God speaking to His creation, every single time, they obeyed – not once was God's command met with rebellion. Isn't that interesting, that the part of creation that is not created in the image of God, with the ability to reflect His nature / character, is far more obedient to God than we humans who are created in His image?

As in the previous cases mentioned, in this case too, when God spoke to the fish, it obeyed and did what God intended – it vomited Jonah. Despite the fact that God caused the fish to ingest Jonah, He prevented the fish from digesting him. If God would have permitted that, then our story would have been over a long time back and we'd have nothing much to learn from it, except that rebellion has tragic consequences – and nothing more.

The Lord knew that the purpose for the fish swallowing Jonah was fulfilled – he was led to repentance. He repented of his rebellion and was now willing to go ahead with fulfilling God's plan – not just for his life, but for the lives of the people of Nineveh as well.

When the Lord allows us The Church to go through times of adversity and persecution (and we will go through it), He permits it so as to awaken us out of our slumber and lethargy. Though we might have forgotten our identity and the purpose of our existence, God has not and never will forget, and until we return to that understanding of our identity and purpose, the Lord will, in love, do all it takes to get us back on track. And when we repent, we will be restored to our former glory as The Church.

Let us not lose hope and think for one moment that though the church is on the decline in many parts of the world, that in due course, the church will cease to exist. Let's remember the words of Jesus who said in **Matthew 16:19**, *"…I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."* This means that The Church-at-large can never be destroyed, because the builder and architect is Christ Himself. So let's not lose heart, but prevail in prayer, labour in service with this hope in mind and never give up.

"…Onto dry land."

These are amazing three words that often go unnoticed when we go through the story of Jonah. The fish was in the sea – in fact, Jonah said in his prayer that he went down to the depths of the sea – to the foundations of the mountains, which means this fish had gone pretty deep in the waters. But here we see that when God speaks to the fish to vomit Jonah, it just doesn't obey God immediately and do so in the middle of the sea, but actually finds it's way to the shore and vomits him there.

Imagine if the fish had to vomit Jonah in the sea itself, he would have had to find the shore and swim to it, but God took care of that struggle by causing the fish to vomit him on dry land. Jonah's only task now was to get to Nineveh and do what He was commissioned to do, and what He had decided to do after spending three days and three nights in the living submarine as it were.

Imagine the scene today if we were on a beach and saw this really huge fish heading to shore, it might have seemed like one of the many whales that beach themselves, and struggle to head back into the sea and so die there. But remember that this was no whale as a whale cannot swallow a man. The next thing that would have surprised us is, to see a fish vomiting on the

shore. That could have been passed off for a case of severe indigestion, but the third and biggest surprise that we would have had, would have been when we saw what it vomited – a man – not a corpse, but a man who was still alive and well. It might have caused the faint-hearted amongst us to literally faint.

Remember the time Jonah was in the ship with the sailors and how, after they discovered that he was the cause of the trouble they were in, despite him telling them to throw him into the sea, they strove to row back to shore but in vain. Here we find, with no effort on Jonah's part he arrives on dry land. Isn't it amazing that sometimes when God decides to do something in and through us, no one – not even we can get in His way? It's amazing how far away from God rebellion gets us and how much pain and misery we experience and cause others as well. But what's also noteworthy is how repentance causes the Lord to bring us back to the path and in ways that we could never have imagined.

We know that The Church has to a large extent rebelled against our original call to be all that we were meant to be, and to do what we were called, and chosen to do, and as a result we are becoming a laughing stock in many countries, and we are on the decline as well. But let's also remember that when the Lord begins to deal with us, to bring us to repentance, though the paths He takes us through will be rough and tough, He will bring us through and get us to where we were supposed to be – and all with no effort on our part whatsoever. We still have time to repent and get back to God and to become and do all that we were supposed to, before we head for tougher times of refining for us, The Church and times of redefining to the world as to who we are as The Church.

Let's seek the Lord while we can – He is merciful and gracious, and will relent if only we will repent. Today is the day – not only is tomorrow not guaranteed us, but it also might be too late. Let's get back to that place of intimate relationship with God and be about all that the Lord would have us be and do. He is merciful and gracious and will welcome us back with open arms. The world needs to see Jesus in action and since we are the body of Christ, there's no other way God has designed for them to see Him except through us. Let's get back to God, if we've gone away and if we are enjoying our journey with Him, let's get more intimate in our walk with Him and let's mentor others along the way as well.

22 – The Second Commission

Jonah 3:1 – *"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you."*

"Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time…"
When we read the above words of the Lord to Jonah in **Jonah 1:2,** *"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."* We are also reminded of Jonah's reaction to the Lord's commission to him in verse 3, *"But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."* We've looked at all that happened as a result of Jonah's rebellion that eventually led to his repentance. Now we see the Lord being gracious and commissioning him the 2nd time with the same commission to go and preach to the Ninevites.

Isn't it a wonderful thing to know that our Lord is so gracious and does not give up on us no matter how much we rebel against Him, and how He is willing to forgive and restore us back to Himself and to His calling on our lives, if only we are willing to repent? I'm sure at least a few of you reading this devotion can identify with Jonah's initial rebellion, where we too, rebelled against God's call on our lives to take His word to the world and perhaps later repented and responded in obedience. I for one, can certainly identify with Jonah in this way as I had rebelled twice before I actually responded in obedience to the call of God on my life to go into full-time ministry, and I've never regretted that decision ever since.

It's really sad that The Church-at-large has, to a large extent not willingly and gladly embraced the Great Commission as a Commission to us to make disciples of all nations, but has instead rebelled against the call of God on us as The Body of Christ and we've brought upon ourselves untold misery and even been the cause of the name of the Lord being blasphemed among unbelievers, much like it says in **Isaiah 52:5** and again referred to in **Ezekiel 36:20-23** and by Apostle Paul in **Romans 2:24**. It does seem like history has a way of repeating itself. Rebellion seems to be not just an issue with the people of God in the past, where God said through Isaiah in Isaiah 65:2-3, *"I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face…"* but it seems to be the problem of The Church of today as well. We've become so lackadaisical concerning God His ways and His plans and His purposes for us as The Body of Christ, that we no longer matter to the world. Not only are we the cause of the name of the Lord being blasphemed among the non-believers, but we've also become a laughing stock to them.

It's high time we stopped, pondered our ways and repented of our rebellion. This global pandemic has shaken us up, woken us up alright, but if we don't repent despite this, then there's every chance there's going to come a time of persecution that The Church will go through and that will bring about repentance alright. We can learn things two ways – the easy way or the hard way – let's not have to learn it the hard way.

"Saying, 'arise, go to Nineveh, that great city…"
It's interesting that the posture Jonah was in when God gave him the first commission seems to have been similar to that of the position he was in when God gave him the second commission, because God begins again with the word, "Arise." When God gave him the first commission he might have been lying down in bed or on his knees in prayer and now when

God speaks to him again, he might have just been lying on the beach after being vomited by the fish and so God uses the same word to him again, *"Arise."*

The next thing God tells Jonah is once again the same thing He said to him the first time – the words were, *"Go to Nineveh, that great city."* Though we might have forgotten our mission as The Church, we should not, for one moment think that the Lord has forgotten too. He is not man that He should change His mind.

The word, *'Go,'* reminds us of the word in the Great Commission, where Jesus after proclaiming the authority He has been given on earth and heaven, said, *"Go…"* That's the word to us The Church – to go. We were not meant to sit still in one place and enjoy life like the rest of the world – we were commissioned to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations. If the believers of the early church remained in one place, Christianity would have been limited to one place – Jerusalem and not gone beyond it's walls, but because the believers went to different places – either because they got scattered because of persecution or because they decided to take the message to other places, The Church of today has it's presence in almost every country in the world. But the job is still unfinished – there are still places that need to be reached and several places that need to be reached again because faith has not been passed down to the next generation and so Christianity is on the decline in those places.

Jonah was told to go one great city – Nineveh. It was a prosperous, powerful city and the capital city of the Assyrian empire back in the day and it seemed like this had led them into a very sinful way of life that God despised. The Commission to us The Church today is not to one city, or country, but rather to "all nations." Our goal is wider than that of Jonah, and understandably so, because it has been given to more people than one – it's been given to every single believer in The Body of Christ across the globe.

"…and preach to it the message that I tell you."
The same Lord who called Jonah to be a preacher of repentance, called him the 2nd time and gave him the same message. Though we might rebel against the call of God on our lives, He never forgets and His call is still the same. He called and chose the church with a purpose and though the church has rebelled against God and walked away from His call, the call remains, and the Lord will do anything to help the church rediscover the call of God – the call that He never forgot.

The instruction that God gives Jonah is to proclaim the message He gives him to proclaim. Very often, we are hesitant to speak to people because we don't know what to say or even how to start the conversation around God and so don't even venture in that direction. But we can be assured that if we are obedient and willing to speak on God's behalf, He will give us the words to speak. God's methodology will be far more effective than our well thought through plans – after all it's His message through us – it's not our message about Him.

23 – The Repetant Prophet

Jonah 3:3-4 – *"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"*

We just read how the Lord spoke with Jonah the second time and gave him the same message to go and preach against Nineveh. Let's look at Jonah's reaction to the second Commission by the Lord, especially after the terrible ordeals he experienced both on the surface of the sea with the tempest and in the heart of the sea in the belly of the great fish.

"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord…."
When the read of the Lord speaking with Jonah the first time, the sentence that followed the Lord's instruction began with the word, "But," and continued to read, "Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." In contrast, when God speaks to Jonah the second time, we read of a different response by Jonah. The first word that begins to describe his response to God's commission is, "So," and continues to read, "Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." Notice the contrast of Jonah's responses to both the calls of God on his life. One was of immediate rebellion and the other is of immediate, implicit obedience. This time, instead of rebelling against God, he instead chose to do, "according to the word of the Lord."

It's obvious that Jonah had learned his lesson well, though he had to learn it the hard way. He had learned that rebellion was not the best way when it comes to walking with God – in fact, it was never even an option. He had experienced first-hand how rebellion against God, not only affected his own life, but it also had ripple effects on the lives of others around him. Not only did Jonah suffer three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, but he had also put the mariners through untold misery, and also caused the loss of cargo from the ship – cargo that perhaps belonged to other people.

Let's take a look at ourselves as The Church-at-large. How have we responded to the Great Commission by Jesus? Looking back, The Church responded rather well initially and went about doing just that – making disciples. But over time the vision changed and disciple-making took a back seat and eventually even got forgotten and the consequences are there for all to see – The Church on the decline in many countries.

Over the years in history, the Lord has done, or permitted several things to wake The Church up to its calling and vision, and oftentimes, there have been awakenings and revivals. At the moment we are in one such awakening with this global pandemic. Once again, it's only those who see the hand of the Lord in this and hear the message of the Lord to The Church, who will wake up and return to the God-ordained purpose for The Church, while the rest will continue on, oblivious to the message of the Lord to The Church through this pandemic. It's to those who've woken up that these words will resonate – "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." Let's each of us arise and get about doing what the Lord has called us as individuals in The Church to do, and before long we'll find a huge Church-wide, world-wide revival taking place.

“Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent.”
The above sentence gives us a glimpse, not just about the city of Nineveh, but also the extent to which Jonah’s mission to preach would extend – three days. It says that Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, and understandably so, as it was the capital of the Assyrian empire at the time. It had a population of a hundred and twenty thousand people, and as it says in the verse, it took three days to travel across it. That would seem much bigger than any of our present-day cities, which we could traverse in less than three days, even if it were on foot.

When you look at the words, “three day journey in extent,” it tells us that Jonah’s mission would have only have lasted three days had he obeyed the Lord the first time, but instead he put himself and others through so much turmoil, and eventually had to spend the same number of days and nights in the belly of the great fish before he actually obeyed the Lord.

Looking at ourselves The Church, it seems like our mission to make disciples of all nations would have been a rather easy task if every one of us got busy doing just that and if we did that consistently over time. We might have reached and discipled our world centuries ago. But sadly, we have failed to do so, and we got side-tracked a great deal. We are now very far from fulfilling our task, and in the process, many generations have been hurt, and even lost as a result. But it’s never too late to repent and obey the Lord – He’s gracious, merciful, and faithful to reconcile back to Himself and to our calling.

“And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day’s walk. Then he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”
As we discovered in our first devotion, Nineveh was not anywhere near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea – it was to the East of it. We have no idea of the actual location where the big fish vomited Jonah out on dry land, but what is mentioned is that from that spot it was on the first day itself that he began to enter the city of Nineveh. No sooner Jonah entered the city, he began preaching – he was not delaying any longer; he had wasted enough time. His message was simply what the Lord had told him to say – “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” This did not in any way seem like a call to repent from their wicked ways but was rather a message of impending doom. There didn’t seem to be anything they needed to do but to wait for God’s wrath to come upon them – there was no call to action. As hard as it was for Jonah to pronounce those words over and over as he walked through the city, pronounce them he did, in obedience to the Lord.

We, The Church need to remember that the message we are called to proclaim is about both inviting people into a love relationship with the God of the Universe, and it’s also a warning about judgment on those who reject God and His gift of eternal life. Rejecting God’s gift of life is choosing death instead.

The message is also a message of warning to us The Church who fail to carry out what God desires for us to in and through our lives. If after we’ve been saved by God’s grace, we are not concerned for those around us, then we are pronouncing judgment on ourselves because we care nothing for perishing souls around us. Very often we find ourselves coming down hard on unbelievers in our messages to them, and being soft on ourselves, The Church, when in fact, we need to be soft and inviting to unbelievers and judge ourselves, so we don’t fall into condemnation because of our negligence towards God and His call on our lives.

Our message has the power to transform people's lives inside out. They will receive forgiveness of sin, freedom from sin, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Their perspective on life, death, money, knowledge, identity, purpose, and everything else, will be changed forever.

There is a flip side though, that we should not forget – those who believe are saved by God, and those who do not believe are condemning themselves. Jesus, while talking with Nicodemus said so in John 3:18 - "He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Jesus was referring to Himself as the Son of God in no uncertain terms there. While Jonah had been told by the Lord the actual number of days after which the Lord would destroy Nineveh, we have not been told when The Judge Jesus will return. No one knows that but God Himself. Sadly instead of this creating a sense of urgency in us, The Church, we've grown to become careless and negligent in fulfilling our God-given responsibility of taking His Word to the world and making disciples of all nations. We've begun to take God's patience for granted and no longer take God's word seriously. Let's never forget that just because we've forgotten or chosen to not remember God's plan for us The Church, God has never, and will never forget His plans for us. He'll do anything to bring us back on track.

We need to take this message of Salvation through faith in Jesus to the world and then to help disciple them into this new life. If we as individuals have rebelled against the call of God to take His word to the world, let's not waste another moment and get going with accomplishing God's commission for our lives. If, on the contrary, we have been busy fulfilling the great commission consistently, then let's continue to do so, and not give up, knowing that our labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Let's be led by the Spirit of God – there's no better life than being led by God's Holy Spirit. He knows the hearts and minds of the people He would have us serve, He knows what He wants each one of us to do, He's given us the spiritual gifts to accomplish what He will have us accomplish and He gives us the power to do it as well. We need just listen and follow implicitly and we will see the results God desires to see. It's not about what we want to see happen through us, but it's really what God desires to see happen through us that matters.

24 - The City-wide Repenting

Jonah 3:5 – *"So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his [b]nobles, saying, let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?"*

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

In response to Jonah's obedience to God and his preaching to the people of Nineveh, three astounding things happen – the people of Nineveh believe God, they proclaim a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. We're not sure whether Jonah expected this to happen and if he didn't, then this would have been most astounding to him. He was preaching a message that seemed to be final and binding on the people of Nineveh, one which the Lord had decided on, and was not going back on. He was warning of God's impending punishment on the people on account of their sins and it came with a deadline, *"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"* **(Jonah 3:4)**

The fact that the people believed Jonah and proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth instead of arguing with, questioning, attacking, or reasoning with Jonah, is an indicator that they themselves knew that their lifestyle was displeasing to God and deserving of punishment. It's much like when we do wrong and are aware of it, we don't really question when it's exposed and we allow ourselves to be held accountable for it. It's only the very rebellious and stubborn person who would try to justify his sin. It's those who acknowledge their sin that has a chance of finding mercy and forgiveness from God, not those who seek to cover up their sins In fact that's what the wise King Solomon himself said in Proverbs 28:13, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

It wasn't long before the news of what was happening in the city came to the knowledge of the king. What's even more astounding is the fact that not only did the people acknowledge their sin, but even the king readily acknowledged his sin and that of the people. He did three things that demonstrated his personal repentance – he got off his throne and laid aside his robe (of royalty), covered himself instead with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. This was a common symbol of repentance – wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes. When he got off his throne and laid aside his royal robe, he was saying in effect that though he was an earthly king, He was in no way comparable with God - the King of the universe. By covering himself with sackcloth and sitting in ashes, he was saying in no uncertain terms that he was acknowledging his sin before the God-King of the universe and pleading for His mercy and forgiveness.

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

Not only did the king repent, but he also passed a decree throughout the city of Nineveh instructing all people and animals to undertake a fast, where they abstained from both food and water. The king had exercised authority before, but no one would have ever heard of a decree of this nature before. He was taking advantage of his position as 'king,' to bring the entire city to repentance. While many people in positions of influence might use their influence in ways that are not conducive to national growth and would rather better themselves, while they can, here was an instance where the supreme authority in the land was using his authority in a good way – to expedite a change in the lifestyle of both himself and his people, so as to save the lives of both himself and the people he led. He was so serious about his decree that it not only affected humans but animals as well. The decree prevented any person or animal from consuming food or water.

But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.
Not only did the king sit in sackcloth as a symbol of repentance, but he also made all the people and animals follow suit. He went one step further in his act of national repentance. He asked that every person, "turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." Here he was getting to the root cause of the problem. God was not concerned about the attire they wore to display their repentance as much as he was in them turning from their sinful ways, and that's exactly what the king asked each person to do - to turn from their evil ways and from the evil that was in their hands. He seemed to know that this was the very reason that God was angry with his city. It was their sinful lifestyle that God was displeased with and was about to destroy the city on account of this. Instead of pretending that sin didn't exist or trying to reason it away, in humble acceptance of his and his people's sins, he repented and ordered that everyone else also repented. That speaks highly of him as a leader – humble acceptance of his wrong-doing – not a very common trait among most leaders today though.

Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?
The king then goes on to make a statement of faith in God. He seems to believe that perhaps God will be merciful and change his mind when he sees the repentance that he and his citizens demonstrate. He doesn't seem to be sure that God would change His mind but seems to have a ray of hope that God just might. Where he got that grain of faith from or that understanding of the nature of God from we don't know, but he did seem to believe that this was a remote possibility. He seemed to be saying, "If we repent, God may relent and be merciful to us." He seemed to know more about God than many of believer of today who claims to know God. So often we are guilty of wanting to see God's punishment or acts of chastisement on those who've wronged us, forgetting that we worship a loving, merciful God who is willing to give people a long rope, demonstrating his love and patience, just as He demonstrated, and continues to demonstrate to us on a daily basis.

When we look at the above verses, it might be a good thing to stop and take a look at our own lives, both individually and as a part of The Church-at-large. Let's ask ourselves where we stand before God. When God looks at our lives, does He see people who love and honor Him – not only in the way we talk, sing, and write but in the way we live our lives as well? Or does He see people who are so sinfully self-centered that despite all His love, grace, and mercy that

He has showered on us (and continues to), we continue on in our own sinfully selfish and rebellious ways of living that are in total contrast to His divine nature and expectations of us? Have we falsely come to believe that since Jesus died for our sins, it doesn't really matter how we live? Have we begun to take God's grace for granted? Are our lives any better than the world around us or are we worse off than they are? Are we honoring God and giving rise to the world around us honoring Him as well, or are we dishonoring God by our lifestyles and giving cause for the world around us to blaspheme the name of God. We play a major role in the way the world sees God as we are the body of Christ here on earth and we were meant to be a reflection of Him in every way.

I believe that each one of us needs to do a Holy Spirit-led, soul-searching, and repent of our sinful ways and ask God to have mercy on us. Let's not take God's love, grace, and patience for granted, because if we do, we will have to face the consequences, and then we will have no one to blame, but ourselves. This need for repentance is a huge need – not so much for the world, as it is for us The Church of today.

This global pandemic has come to shake us up and wake us up as The Church, and instead of us getting lethargic and delving deeper into our sinful ways, let's instead decide to repent and turn back to God – get back to that level of intimacy we once enjoyed with Him. It was that intimate relationship we enjoyed with God that enabled us to do what we did and live the fruitful lives we once lived. It's what gave us our sense of identity, purpose, meaning in life, hope beyond the grave, and everything else that God intended for us to be and do. It's never too late to repent – today is the day – we are not guaranteed tomorrow. **Hebrews 3:15** says, *"Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."* Let's repent while we have time, knowing that we do worship a merciful, loving, forgiving, gracious God, who is willing to forgive us and restore us to that relational intimacy we once enjoyed.

25 - The Divine Relenting

Jonah 3:10 – *"Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."*

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way…
In **Jonah 1:2**, God had told Jonah that the wickedness of the people of Nineveh had come up before the Lord. This means that the Lord was aware of their wickedness and hence sent Jonah with the message of warning of impending judgment. Here we see a similar, yet different thing that the Lord was aware of – He saw their works, that they turned from their evil way.

Many of us have grown up with a warped or lopsided understanding of God – that He is constantly watching us to see where and when we do wrong so he can punish or chastise us for the wrong-doing. We grew up with an impression of God as being stern and angry, who was not capable of love at all. That's so far from the truth though.

God is loving, holy, just merciful, forgiving, gracious, encouraging, motivating, and much more. Not only are these characteristics of God evident in the pages of the Bible, but His ways are very obvious to those of us who know Him – we've experienced what the Bible says about Him to be true. He isn't waiting to catch us in our wrong, but rather watching over us in love to help us walk in ways that are good for us – ways that reflect His character and nature. We aren't doing God a favour when we obey Him – we're doing ourselves a huge favour.

The people of Nineveh must have, like many of us, gone to such an extent in their sinful rebellion against God and His ways, that God had to take action against them, and so He sent Jonah to them with the message of this impending doom, and with a timeline – 40 days.

But when they repented of their sinful ways, it was clearly evident that they acknowledged their wrong-doing, and were seeking God's mercy on their lives. Let's look at this logically. If God was upset with them for their sinful ways, it means He would have been pleased with them if they were not wicked, or if they ceased from their wickedness. And that's exactly what the people of Nineveh too much have thought, for them to decide to repent. Every one of them repented of their evil way.

The world of today needs to do what the people of Nineveh did long ago. It needs to repent of a lot of things that are in total rebellion to God and His ways and His expectations. If they do, they can be sure that the Lord will take note that they have turned from their evil way.

So it's obvious by now that not only do we The Church need to repent of our sinful, rebellious ways that are in total contrast to God and His expectations of us, but the world too needs to repent of its ways, else the Judgement that God speaks about so much in His Word is round the bend, and we will be caught napping when it comes. The Apostle Peter, in **1 Peter 1:7**, writes cautioning his readers (and us) to take heed to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord, bearing in mind that, "the end of all things is close at hand," and later, in **verse 17**, writes, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* He then says, *"If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"* This seems to be a reference to Proverbs 11:31, which says, *"If the righteous will be [a]recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner."*

And God relented…
This verse is perhaps the most beautiful verse and a climactic verse in the entire book of Jonah, and one that can teach us volumes, though we are separated from it by so many centuries. When the people of Nineveh repented, the God of the universe relented. Is that not astounding, that God would change His mind on account of mere mortals like us, who in comparison, are nothing before Him? Does it not speak volumes about the love of God for us His creation who were created in His image, in His likeness, so we may enjoy a relationship with Him?

This verse gives hope to both the world of today, as well as to The Church of today. We can be sure that if we repent, the Lord will relent from the disaster He has planned to bring upon those who reject His Son, Jesus. It's both sad and shameful that we sometimes hear ourselves talking of impending judgment as if we were entirely righteous ourselves and not in danger of standing before the Judgment seat of Christ ourselves, when in actual fact, Jesus said, *"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment."* I think every one of us has spoken more than a million idle words in our lives, so we are not exempt ourselves.

Let's all repent - both us, as The Church of today, and then take the message of Salvation to the world around, that they too may have a chance to repent of their ways, knowing that we have a God of love, mercy, and grace, who is willing to relent, if only we are willing to repent. *"From the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."*

What was God relenting of? He was relenting of the destruction He was planning to bring upon the people of Nineveh. That destruction would perhaps have been like that of the destruction that the Lord brought on the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, where no one but Lot and his family were spared, not forgetting his wife lost her life and became a pillar of salt on account of her disobedience in looking back.

If the Lord had not relented, then we'd have yet another story of a city destroyed by God. But given the nature of the repentance of the King and the people of Nineveh that was not how the story ended.

Unlike the people of Nineveh, where the destruction announced by God was merely physical, there's another destruction that's coming up – one that has eternal ramifications. This destruction is something no one can ever imagine. In fact, the word, eternity itself can't fully be comprehended by man, let alone eternal destruction/punishment.

All the world needs to do to escape the ensuing judgment is to take the offer of Salvation that God offers through His Son Jesus Christ and they can experience the mercy of God and His grace, love, brand new life, and a lot more, not forgetting eternity in the presence of God.

Let us as The Church take this as yet another call to repent of our rebellious ways and get back to God and all that He intended for us to be, and get about taking His word to the world so they too get a chance to repent.

26 – The Second Death Wish

Jonah 4:1-4 – *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" 4 Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"*

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry….

Jonah preached, and the King and the people repented. When they repented, God relented from sending on them the punishment He had planned. When God relented, Jonah lamented. The first reaction by Jonah to God relenting was that of exceeding displeasure and anger. Those are perhaps two of the least expected emotions from a man of God in response to God relenting on pouring out his wrath on people.

Jonah's attitude to the people of Nineveh is in total contrast to that of Abraham and Moses. Abraham pleaded for the people of Sodom and Moses pleaded for the people of Israel when God planned to destroy them. While Abraham and Moses seemed to have the people of Sodom and the people of Israel in mind, Jonah seemed to have just one person in mind – himself.

The questions that beg to be answered by us, The Church are:

- How concerned are we about the world around us?
- Are we concerned for them enough to do all we can to see them saved or are we comfortably and complacently lost in our own little worlds, where we, like Jonah, are at the centre of everything and no one else matters?
- What would our reaction be if we saw the Lord reveal Himself to the world around in such a way that millions started pouring into The Church?
- Would we rejoice with them or would we lament on account of their repentance?

So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?

No sooner Jonah feels exceeding displeasure and anger, he speaks – much like most of us today. We either, think and speak or we feel and speak. Sometimes the gap between thinking, feeling, and speaking is so small, that one wonders whether there was any thinking involved at all. Jonah begins to pray. While, on the surface, that sounds like a nice thing to do when one is upset or angry, what matters really, is the kind of prayer we pray at that time. Jonah prays, *"Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country?"*

It looks like Jonah had had this conversation with God when God spoke to him the first time, even before he rebelliously left for Tarshish to try to flee from God's presence. Here he reminds God of that conversation, (as if God would have forgotten it). What Jonah seems to be saying, in essence, is, *"Lord, I told you so, I knew you would do this."*

Before we get all judgmental about Jonah, let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves what we might have done had each of us been in Jonah's shoes. Imagine we've spent three full days warning the people that God's wrath would fall on them in 40 days and then God changes His mind. What thoughts would have raced through our minds? How would we have felt and what

might we have done? I would have felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself because God did not send the punishment I had so vehemently warned the people was coming. I would have felt like a false prophet and a liar. I might even have fear a reaction from the king and the people after nothing happened to them when the 40 days had elapsed. I'm sure I'm not the only one who would have thought and felt that way.

Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

Despite Jonah repenting of his rebellion from within the belly of the fish, he then begins to justify his initial rebellion, thus paving the way for another one to follow. When we justify past sins, we set the stage for a repetition of them, in the near future. Jonah says that it's because he knew God would change his mind that he decided on a pre-emptive escapade in the first place.

But there seems to be more that Jonah knew apart from just what God would do – he seemed to also know God personally enough to predict His reaction, in case the people of Nineveh repented of their evil ways, in response to his preaching. He knew that God was "slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm." Jonah seemed to have had such an intimate relationship with God that, He knew God's nature. He mentions five different things about the nature of God that each of us must never forget, and should in fact strive towards reflecting in our own lives as well.

The first thing he says that he knew about God is that He is gracious. Grace was not revealed only in the New Testament – it was revealed right from the beginning in the Garden of Eden itself, and all through the Old Testament – but when Jesus came, He came full of grace and truth. **(John 1:14)**. Jonah knew that God gave people good things that they didn't deserve and could never earn, which is really the definition of grace – 'unmerited favour.' Jonah had just experienced first-hand the grace of God in his life in the belly of the fish and in it's vomiting him onto dry land.

He also knew that God is merciful – that God did not give man the punishment he deserved. Cathleen Falsani said it this way, "Justice is getting what you deserve, mercy is not getting what you deserve and grace is getting what you absolutely don't deserve - benign goodwill, unprovoked compassion, the un-earnable gift" Jonah had also just experienced God's mercy first-hand God's mercy in the sea.

Further, he knew that God is slow to anger. If the Lord were not slow to anger, I guess none of us would be alive today – we should be so thankful that the Lord is slow to anger. Not only had Jonah just experienced both the grace of God and the mercy of God in the belly of the fish, and in the sea, but he also experienced the fact that God was slow to anger because had He not been slow to anger, Jonah would not have been having this questionable and questioning conversation with God.

He also knew that God is abundant in loving kindness. Not only is loving-kindness a quality of God but He is abundant in His loving kindness. This means that the kindness that God shows us stems from His love for us, and it's not in small quantities that God pours out his loving kindness on us, but rather in abundance. This is another attribute of God that Jonah had just recently discovered when he was thrown into the Mediterranean Sea. Imagine a fish swallowing a man whole, him not getting digested for three days, him remaining alive and

eventually being vomited alive – not in the sea, but on to dry land – how abundant is that loving-kindness of God?

The fifth thing that Jonah knew was that God relents from doing harm. Here again, another attribute of God that must be very fresh in Jonah's mind given the fact that God relented from bringing harm to Jonah despite his rebellion against God's first call to him to go and preach to the people of Nineveh.

Jonah, knowing the God he worshipped seemed to have anticipated God's reaction to the possible repenting of the people of Nineveh and that's exactly what he saw happen and it made him exceedingly distressed and angry.

We, as The Church, need to always bear in mind these five attributes of God that Jonah mentions in his prayer to God. Not only have most of us experienced (and continue to experience) those attributes of God in our own lives on a daily basis, but that's also what the world around us needs to experience very badly in these tough, turbulent, and tumultuous times. Let's go beyond merely remembering these attributes of God, and let's make a conscious effort to reflect these qualities in our lives as His children, so the world may see these qualities in our lives and get attracted to the source of these qualities – God, through Jesus Christ.

Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!

After revealing all he knew about God, Jonah now puts forth his request to God – the second death-wish. The first death-wish by Jonah was when he asked the sailors to pick him up and throw him into the sea so that the sea would become calm for them (Jonah 1:12). He asks the Lord to take his life from him. It's interesting that Jonah does not decide to take his own life, but instead asks the Lord to take his life from him. He seems to realise that he has no right to take his own life, since he's not the giver of life and so he instead asks the giver of life to be the taker of his life as well.

He then goes on to give a reason for the request – *"It is better for me to die than to live."* Jonah seems to have come to a place in his life where he thinks or feels (or both), that he has fulfilled his life's purpose and there's nothing more for him to do, but die. In that statement is also an element of comparison between the choice to live or die, and for the second time, it seems that Jonah prefers death to life.

I'm sure some of us have been through times in our lives when we preferred death to life and praise God He intervened and helped us realise that the opposite was true, and life is always better than death. Choosing death over life is an act of defeat. Death by choice does not solve problems – not for us, and not for our loved ones either. May that never be even a thought that crosses any of our minds – no matter what we go through in life.

"Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

No sooner Jonah prays the Lord answers. What a wonderful experience it is when God answers our prayers immediately, and still better when God answers our questions immediately. Though it's not always the case that God answers us immediately, (and might take time to respond, perhaps because we are not yet ready for his response), in Jonah's case, the Lord seems to have answered immediately. And the way the Lord responds to Jonah's question is – with a question.

It's interesting that Jesus too, very often responded to questions with questions For example in **Mark 11:27-33**, we read the amazing response of Jesus to the chief priests, scribes, and elders who came to Him with a question – read the conversation below.

"Then they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him. 28 And they said to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?" 29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one question; then answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things: 30 The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men? Answer Me." 31 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' 32 But if we say, 'From men' "—they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. 33 So they answered and said to Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus answered and said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

God asks Jonah a very pertinent question – *"Is it right for you to be angry?"* That's a very loaded question. It seems that the three days of preaching by Jonah was sufficient for him to forget the three days he spent in the belly of the big fish – not that he literally forgot the incident, but he was no longer living in the realisation of it. He seems to have forgotten the grace, mercy, slowness of God's anger, the abundance of God's loving-kindness, and God's relenting from bringing harm to him, and now he was wishing the worst on the people of Nineveh. God seems to be reminding him of God's goodness in his life through that question. God seems to be saying to Jonah, *"Is it right, just or fair for you to be angry with me for dealing with the people of Nineveh the way I dealt with you?"*

That's a good question for us The Church of today too. After having received the grace, mercy, slowness of God's anger, the abundance of his loving-kindness, and God's relenting from bringing harm to us, are we wishing that God would do the opposite to those who are yet to come to know Him? Or after we've received so much from God, have we reached a place of careless complacency where we don't care anymore about the lives and eternity of those around us? We can't afford to take that stance, because that's not right on our part. That would be like the four men with leprosy in **2 Kings 7:3-20**, where the Lord had been gracious to them in providing them with food, clothes, gold, and silver, and then they became so obsessed with it all, that they forgot the people of the entire city, who were dying of starvation. Then the four men came to this realisation and said these powerful words – words that apply to us, The Church of today, *"We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now, therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household."* **(2 Kings 7:9).**

Let's do all we can to take the Gospel of Jesus to the world around us – we are not guaranteed tomorrow, so let's do all we can today.

27 - The Second Rebellion

Jonah 4:5: *"Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade, and waited to see what would happen to the city."*

Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city…
No sooner than Jonah has this second conversation with God and is asked by God, *"Is it right for you to be angry?"* does he hit the road again. We've heard the axiom, It's either my way or the highway." This seems like the policy of Jonah in this particular story – when things don't go his way, he hits the highway literally. He leaves Nineveh – the city he preaches against - the city that whole-heartedly repented of their sin. He leaves this city and finds a place to sit down. Jonah was a man just like us, with rebellion imbibed in his bones. The last time he ran was when the Lord first commissioned Him to go and preach against Nineveh. Here we see him running once again.

Just as running needs a break, so also running away needs a break. That's exactly what Jonah did – he took a break on the east of the city. We don't know why he chose to go east of the city and not west. One probability is that he was expecting a Sodom and Gomorrah-like wrath to be poured out on Nineveh and in that case, there would be fire and if there was fire, there would be smoke and perhaps the wind was blowing west. So if he went west, then the smoke would come his way, and no one likes breathing smoke – especially that of a burning city. (That's just an imaginative probability).

There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade…
Jonah seems to be both an adventurous and an industrious man. The first time he rebelled against God, he bought himself a ticket on a ship to Tarshish. Here we see him doing another thing for himself – building a shelter. It seems like Jonah knew how to take care of himself, even if he was on a rebellious journey – much like us The Church as well.

How similar to Jonah we The Church-at-large are. We've decided to rebel against God's call on our lives to take the Gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations and instead, we've become so obsessed with our own lives. Nothing matters more to us than our own lives – even though we're on a dangerous rebellious journey trying to run away from God, despite several 'second-chances.' We've not only rebelled once and gone on journeys far away from where we were supposed to be serving, but we've also built ourselves great shelters where we can relax and enjoy life, just like the rest of the world around.

We've forgotten that we were not saved to serve ourselves, but rather to serve the world around us. We're here as the Body of Christ, to do what He the Head of The Church began to do when He walked the earth. He has given us this amazing mandate – to finish what He started. But we've deliberately chosen to rebel against God and become caught up with ourselves and our pleasures.

Jonah built the shelter to shield himself from the sun as he was nowhere near buildings. He had left them all behind to burn with the wrath of God and he was sitting in his self-built shelter. We don't know what his shelter comprised of, but it was enough for him to relax in its shade. The question that arises in our minds must certainly be, "Why would he stop, build a shelter and sit in its shade?" Let's read on.

And waited to see what would happen to the city.
Now we get to understand the purpose behind the break in his rebellious journey, just outside the city, and the reason behind him building a shelter and sitting in its shade. It wasn't that he needed a break from his journey. It wasn't that he was tired or exhausted from the heat of the sun. He had another rather evil desire – one that Abraham and Moses would chide him for had they been around. Jonah wanted to see what would happen to the city.

How similar Jonah was to who we are today. Let there be a tragedy, not only does it get national news coverage but it also gets national viewing, listening, and reading. There's something sadistic in all of us that seems to want to witness tragedy – not our own tragedy, but that of another person. Let's not be like Jonah, waiting for the destruction of unbelievers, but rather, let's get about doing all we can to see them come to Christ – just like we ourselves did one day. We're here to see their Salvation, not their destruction.

Jonah wanted to see what Lot's wife also wanted to see – the city burning. We know what happened to her. Abraham pleaded with the Lord to spare Sodom and Gomorrah and Moses pleaded with the Lord to spare the rebellious people of Israel in the desert, but here we see Jonah finding a cosy, vantage point from there to witness divine wrath on people who've just repented of their sin – and at his preaching at that.

One would imagine Jonah celebrating with the people of Nineveh at their repentance, much like the angels would have been celebrating at the repenting of an entire city. Jesus said, "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." **(Luke 15:10)**. Once again, that was just imagination – Jonah was far from rejoicing – he was rebelling, ranting, and raving at their repenting and God's relenting.

What's our response as The Church to those outside? Are we concerned for them or totally oblivious to the fact that they are headed for a lost eternity if we don't share Christ with them? Are we making ourselves comfortable, instead of getting busy with winning them to the Lord? Here's the terrifying news that none of us in The Church should ever forget – if we fail to reach those the Lord has chosen us to help save, and choose to live as we like, in total rebellion of the Lord, we will sealing our own doom.

Jesus taught a lot about the consequences that would follow those who didn't use what was entrusted to them. Those consequences are eternal. I'm sure this goes against the grain of many who believe that once you're saved, you're saved forever and it doesn't matter how one lives after that, but that's not biblically accurate. There's enough evidence to prove that if we fail to fulfill God's expectations of us, we will face eternal consequences. This isn't to scare one into service. Service must come out of a willing and thankful, obedient heart and mind, but and if we choose to rebel against God and become self-centered, not only will we be jeopardising the lives of others, but we will also be risking our own lives in the process.

Below are just a few passages that talk about the fact that we cannot afford to be lackadaisical in our attitude to our relationship with God, with one another, and with those outside the Body of Christ, whom we were called to help save.

- **The Parable of the Minas - Luke 19:11-27**
- **Hebrews 2:1-3** – *"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast,*

and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation…"

- **1 Corinthians 10:1-5** – *"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness."*

- **Psalm 95:7-11** – *"Today, if you will hear His voice: 8 'Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 When your fathers tested Me; they tried Me, though they saw My work. 10 For forty years I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' "*

- The writer of Hebrews quotes the above verses in **Hebrews 3:7-11**. He goes on to say, in **Hebrews 3:12-19**: *"12Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." 16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."*

Today, when we, The Church, preach the Gospel and people turn to the Lord, how much do we rejoice with them and for them? Do we welcome these new people into our homes and churches? When we see the Lord using these new believers in ways that He never used us, do we rejoice about it or do we secretly envy them? Does our initial, visible joy of seeing their conversion turn to subtle, invisible anger against God? Let's welcome them, invite them to work along with us in the mission that God has given us, let's train them and release them into the ministry that the Lord has for them. Secure people release people, insecure people control them. We are called to be the former, knowing that the Lord who called them *'today,'* called us *'yesterday,'* and if not for others welcoming us, inviting us into their homes and churches, we wouldn't be where we are today. Let's decide to be the welcoming church we were called to be when the Lord first welcomed us (through people) into His family.

28 - The Second Divine Deliverance

Jonah 4:6: *"And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant."*

Then the Lord God provided a plant that it might come up over Jonah…
Though Jonah had prepared a shelter for himself, God decided to prepare a plant to cover him. Perhaps the shelter that Jonah had prepared for himself was not good enough to protect him from the heat of the sun, so God miraculously provided a plant to protect him. How kind of the Lord to protect a person who in anger is questioning his act of mercy on the people of Nineveh.

This reminds us of the time when Adam and Eve made coverings for themselves to hide their shame after they rebelled against God's commandment to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their covering was not good enough, so the Lord covered them with tunics of skin and clothed them. Here again, we see man's rebellion and God's mercy and love at play in the lives of his rebellious children.

What love is this that pardons the sinner and takes care of the rebel as well? Where would we be if had not received the mercy of God despite our sin and the love of God, despite our rebellion?

The Church of today has to a great degree not only rebelled against God's call to make disciples of all nations, but we've gone off on a tangent, living our lives in total rebellion of God, disdaining Him, making a laughing stock of ourselves to the world, and destroying all that He took the pains to build when He sent His Son Jesus into the world to save the world. We're at the centre of our own lives – not God and we no longer care for the people God cares about. Oh how badly we need the mercy of God for our sin and rebellion. His love and mercy are available to us if only we are willing to repent and get back on track to being and doing what we were saved to – loving God and loving our neighbour.

That it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery.
One can imagine how the people of Nineveh perhaps were celebrating God's goodness and mercy toward them in not sending his wrath on them. Not only must they have been rejoicing in gratitude to God for his mercy on them, but the angels in heaven must also have been rejoicing at the repentance of the entire city. Jesus, while telling the parable of the lost sheep talked about the rejoicing there is in heaven over one sinner who repents, "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." But outside the city, it's quite a different scene - Jonah, instead of joining them in their rejoicing and celebration is sulking in the sun.

We all know the ill-effects of exposing ourselves to scorching heat – dehydration, fatigue, sun stokes, etc. The shelter that Jonah had prepared for himself was obviously not providing sufficient protection from the scorching heat of the sun, so God provided another means of adequate shade to protect his head – a plant. It seems that Jonah was already experiencing the effects of the scorching heat of the sun, because the verse says, *"to deliver him from his misery."*

There's another kind of misery that the world is being scorched by - not just today, but since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, and that's the misery of sin. Sin has tarnished the heart

and mind of man to such an extent that it has affected life in every possible way. We The Church know the answer to this age-old problem of sin is Jesus. We need to do all we can to share this good news of Salvation with whoever, whenever, wherever, and however possible.

God has once again provided a 'shade' from the scorching misery of sin by making the helmet of Salvation available to all who will believe. No wonder Apostle Paul, while talking about the armour of God in **Ephesians 6:10-18**, used the picture of the Helmet to refer to Salvation. It's this Salvation that renews our minds and a constant faith in it that keeps us on track as well.

Sadly, not only do the minds of those in the world need to be renewed but even the minds of us in The Church need to be renewed as well – we need to repent (have a change of mind) and turn back to God and His calling on our lives. We've forgotten the calling of God on our lives, forgotten our identity in Christ and our purpose for living as well, and are living self-centered lives, caring nothing about the perishing world around us. Our attitude to the world around is no different than Jonah's attitude to the people of Nineveh.

So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.
Now we find a change in the attitude of Jonah, in response to God's act of kindness to him by preparing a plant to provide shade for his head. He is now filled with the attitude of gratitude. But it looks like the one person Jonah is still concerned about is himself. He is grateful for the plant because it offers protection to him – nothing seems to have changed in his attitude towards the people of Nineveh.

The verse does not mention that Jonah was grateful to the Lord for the plant, it just says that he was grateful for the plant. That plant did not grow up miraculously on its own – it was an act of God on his behalf, but given the negative attitude Jonah had toward God at the time, it looks like Jonah is hesitant to give God the glory and is merely grateful for the plant. How similar to the way we talk today as well. How often either we have said, or we've heard someone say, *"Thank goodness…"* for something good that happens as if goodness was a person. Or, *"I'm so glad I escaped an accident."* We're so hesitant to give God the glory by saying, *"I thank the Lord for His protection, provision, guidance, etc."*

One of the greatest attitudes we as The Church need to always have in life is that of gratitude. In fact, it's this attitude that should be one of the motivating factors for everything we do as believers. The Apostle Paul, after explaining in great detail in **11 Chapters of Romans** about God's plan of Salvation for the whole world, begins **Chapter 12** with these words, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." He is saying in effect, 'Seeing all that God has done for you – the mercy He has shown you, now offer your bodies…"* All we do should stem from an attitude of gratitude to the Lord for what He has done for us. It's not a repayment that we're giving God, but rather an expression of our thankfulness to Him for all He has done for us.

What are we, The Church grateful to God for today? Are the things we are grateful for things pertaining only to ourselves or are we grateful to the Lord for His love, mercy, and grace that He is showering on other people as well? We need to move away from self-centered prayers and praise and include others as well in our thanksgiving and requests. We can't afford to be careless about the needs of those around us – especially a lost world heading to a lost eternity. We've been given a mission – to *"Go and make disciples of all nations,"* so we must do that out of love, and gratitude, not out of a sense of compulsion or duty.

Let’s pray for the people around us who have not yet come to know the amazing merciful God we enjoy a relationship with, and let’s do all we can to reach and disciple them. And when they come into the family, let’s not sulk in the sun like Jonah, but rather, let’s rejoice like, and with the angels in heaven.

29 – The Divine Withdrawal

Jonah 4:7-8: *"But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint."*

But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.
In the previous devotion, we saw how the Lord prepared a plant to provide shade for Jonah but now we read of quite an opposite scenario. In the morning when Jonah awoke, something strange began to happen. One can imagine the restful sleep Jonah had that night, waking up refreshed, only to be met with a surprise he least expected - the plant that he was so grateful for was beginning to wither before his very eyes. But How? The same God who made miraculous provision and offered protection for Jonah had now prepared something else – a worm. This worm began to do something rather strange and disastrous - it damaged the plant so badly that the plant withered.

There's certainly a lesson for Jonah to learn from this act of God, but it's also important that we The Church of today can learn from this act of God.

Not every problem we face is from the evil one, there are times when the Lord himself must bring upon us trouble for the sole purpose of shaking us up and waking us up from our slumber and our lackadaisical attitude to both Him and to life itself. There are times when we become so comfortable with the blessings of God that we tend to think that these blessings were meant for us, and us alone, and forget the fact that we were blessed that we might be a blessing to others as well.

Just as Jonah was grateful for the plant that God provided to protect him from the heat of the sun, we too have enjoyed, and continue to enjoy many of God's blessings of provision and protection. If we are alive and well during this global pandemic, it's itself proof of God's protection over our lives. But if we fail to learn lessons from God's mercy and protection, the Lord may have to temporarily withdraw His hand of mercy and protection from us to teach us a lesson, just as He did for Jonah. The Lord did that several times in the days of the people of Israel in the Old Testament when they rebelled against the Lord and walked in their own sinful ways. He did this, not to destroy them, but rather out of love for them – to bring them back to Him, and He might have to do the same thing to us The Church if we fail to turn back to Him.

The Lord only needed to prepare a worm – something so small and seemingly insignificant, and that did the job God had prepared for it to do – remove the protection Jonah enjoyed. The worm merely damaged the plant and that was sufficient for it to wither. Could Jonah have expected that a small worm could destroy such divine protection he enjoyed? When God decides to do something, it doesn't matter what He uses – it will accomplish His purpose.

Similarly, we The Church need to remember that if the Lord wants to get our attention, he can do anything, even use a microscopic virus to infect not only the world but even us The Church. Have we not all experienced the effects of this microscopic, seemingly invisible virus as it infected and even sometimes took the lives of friends, family, and loved ones? This is certainly the Lord's way of getting the attention of both the world and The Church as well. It's not enough for us to enjoy God's protection and provision, we need to acknowledge the giver of it

as well. The Lord seems to have a greater message for us The Church as it relates to the world around us, but we will look at that in the next devotion.

And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind
As the morning dawned, the Lord prepared the worm, but then when the sun rose, the Lord prepared something more – a vehement east wind. This is the 5th time we see the Lord preparing or sending something Jonah's way. The first thing that God sent his way was the tempest that almost destroyed the ship, the sailors, and all. The second thing that God prepared was the big fish to swallow him and eventually vomit him onto dry land so as to save him from the raging waters, the third thing that God prepared was the plant to provide Jonah with shade from the heat of the sun, the fourth was the worm to damage the plant and cause it to wither and then the fifth thing that God prepared was the vehement east wind. If you notice, you'll find that the same God at certain times sent things Jonah's way to hurt him and at other times, He sent things Jonah's way to help him, the former to stop us in our tracks and get us back to Him and the latter, to move us forward to accomplish all that He desired to in our lives when He called us.

The Lord has the right to do what He wills for whom He wills for whatever reason He wills. It's evident throughout scripture that the Lord chastised His children when they deserved it and this was done in love so that they would cease from rebelling against Him and return to Him. Jonah's adventure is one such rebellious scenario. There were times that the Lord prepared things to stand in Jonah's way and there were times when the Lord prepared things for Jonah for his protection. The tempest was meant to stop Jonah, the great fish to protect him, the plant was meant to protect him, the worm to remove God's protection, and finally, the vehement east wind to bring misery upon him. All this was done by the same God to the same person – Jonah, but for different reasons at different times.

Has not the Lord worked in similar ways in our own lives as well? When He wanted to get our attention, there were times He permitted or even brought about certain difficult situations in our lives, and when He wanted to encourage us on in our journey, the Lord provided and protected us miraculously. This global pandemic seems like one such time that the Lord is trying to get our attention once again, drawing us back to Himself – to the love we once had for Him – a love that resulted in our lives being transformed and also resulted in us getting so involved in reaching and discipling those outside The Church, so that their lives were also transformed through us. Let's not for one moment think that the Lord will shower His blessings on us forever if we choose to rebel against Him continually. He is patient, kind, and longsuffering, but He is also just and loving and will do what it takes to get us back on track. We can learn things the easy way or the hard way – it's up to us, and it's we who stand to gain or lose in the process.

When on the sea, the Lord sent a violent tempest, when on land, He sent a vehement east wind – the former caused a raging of the waves, while the latter perhaps causing heavy dust storms, which would have dried his palate, his skin and made him feel extremely miserable. The Lord who created the winds has the power to do what He wills with them, even if it means causing temporary discomfort to His children, so as to get our attention. Not every storm in our lives is caused by God - there are some that we bring upon ourselves by the bad decisions we make in life, while there are those that the enemy (the devil) will bring our way to try to deter us from our walk with the Lord. But there are those that the Lord Himself will bring upon us and we need to know which of these are the results of our own bad decisions, which are from the devil and which are from the Lord Himself.

We The Church, need to remember that the God of grace and mercy is also the God of Justice and Love – love that chastises His children when they need it. We have rebelled against the Lord in more ways than we can count. We've become lackadaisical and rather rebellious against the Lord's will for us as His body. We've chosen to live for ourselves and even so, at the expenses of those we were meant to serve in the first place. God, who is just, will not remain a silent spectator to this sort of rebellious, selfish behaviour from His children – He will intervene and in ways that He knows best. We can either return to Him on our own or prepare ourselves for worse days ahead, which will serve as a means to bring us back to God.

And the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.
When God removed the plant, and then prepared the east wind, the next thing that happened was that the sun from which Jonah was protected by God began to beat directly on his head and this caused him to grow faint. When protection is provided, it means that there is something harmful that one is being protected from, but if the protection is taken away, then immediately the person gets exposed to whatever it was he was being protected from. Jonah was being protected from the burning desert sun, and with the protection gone, he was now fully exposed to it.

We The Church have enjoyed tremendous blessings of the Lord over the years. We've enjoyed immense freedom to take God's word to the world, but we're gradually beginning to see a turn of events globally. Slowly but steadily this freedom is being taken away from us in many parts of the world. We The Church are not able to do the things we used to do for centuries – have access to and share God's Word, meet freely as churches, be involved in outreach and discipleship, conduct training to equip the Body of Christ, etc. It seems like the Lord has brought about some kind of withdrawal of our freedom in the way we function. We can do two things in response to what we're experiencing with this global pandemic. We can grumble against God, and make no change in the way we live our lives, or we can stop, ponder our ways, repent and return to the Lord with all our heart, before something worse happens to us.
Just like Jonah felt the effects of the scorching heat of the sun on his head, that caused him to grow faint, many of us in The Church have, during this pandemic, either heard of people experiencing, (or have personally experienced) a lack of motivation to do anything. Some of us have even had symptoms of depression, and all on account of this small microscopic, invisible-to-the-naked-eye virus. But still, despite this feeling of weakness, discouragement, and low motivation, let's make every effort to return to the Lord, knowing that He is ever willing to receive us with open arms to Himself and restore us to that place of intimate relationship we once enjoyed with Him.

30 - The Third Death Wish

Jonah 4:8b-9 – *"Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"*

Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."
The heat of the day was undoubtedly quite unbearable, but it's sad to know that the only option Jonah could think of to deal with the situation he was in was that of a defeatist. He could have done other things like returning to Nineveh and taken shelter from the heat; he could have tried building another shelter or something more creative but instead, he wished he could end it all and die.

How often we've either heard of someone talk this way or more closer to home, have we thought this way? Instead of making every attempt to change the situation one is in, the only seemingly available solution is to end one's life. We know that this is not the solution to the problem in any way. It might seem like the end of our problems, but we create new problems for those who are left behind – a child becomes parentless, a spouse becomes a widow or widower, compounded with other feelings of anger, guilt, and grief. And only the Lord knows what the end result of such a situation would be for us on the Day of Judgment.

This was not the first time Jonah had preferred death to life. The first time he preferred death was during the tempest at sea when the mariners discovered that he was the one responsible for the tempest and he decided that if he was thrown into the sea they would be relieved of the tempest – he had no idea that he would be rescued by a big fish. The second time he preferred death to life was when God had mercy on the people of Nineveh and didn't send the punishment He had warned them about through Jonah. This time, Jonah prefers death to life because the protection that God had provided him from the heat was taken away by God and he was now exposed to the unbearable heat of the day. Isn't it strange that Jonah was upset that God had removed the protection He offered Jonah while he sat and waited for the many thousands in Nineveh to die at God's hands? What love for self and what a lack of love for others!

In all the cases where Jonah preferred death to life, Jonah could have done something he didn't – he could have had a change of heart and God would surely have been merciful to him. How so like many of us who, when faced with difficult situations, especially ones that require a change from our side, would prefer to walk away from a relationship, from the situation, and sadly, sometimes, even walk away from life itself.

The question to us The Church is what is, what if all the freedom the Lord gave us to share the gospel was taken away? What if all the comforts we enjoyed were taken away from us? What if the Lord confronted us on our rebellion and lack of concern for the world around us? Would we find ourselves trying to justify ourselves? Would we find ourselves blaming someone else? Would we blame Jesus Himself for giving us the Great Commission in the first place? Would we blame the world around us for not responding to the message? Would we try to flee from the reality we're being confronted with? Or would we think that it's better to end our lives rather than to repent and get back to our first love and calling on our lives? Depending on the way we respond, so will be the outcome.

Do we as The Church find ourselves grumbling about the things we might sometimes lose in life as we sail along waiting for Judgement Day when God's wrath will fall on those who don't

accept Christ? Sadly, that's the attitude of some in The Church who feel that we were saved and that's all there was to it. We don't need to be concerned about the lives of others who have not yet come into the fold. That would make us even more selfish than Jonah because we've had the privilege of knowing Jesus in a way that Jonah didn't. We've seen the mystery of God unravelled through the coming of Christ, and in spite of it all, if we still find ourselves being self-absorbed and unconcerned for those around us, then there's nothing more for us to really wait for except our own Judgement on the Day when Jesus returns and asks us to give an account for all that He entrusted to us so we might serve Him by finishing the task He began of making disciples of all nations.

Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"
After Jonah spoke, preferring death to life, it was now time for God to respond, and God responds in a way that He does so beautifully – with a question. God says to Jonah, *"Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"* Who can question a question by the God of the Universe? How could Jonah be angry about a plant that he did nothing to plant or cause to grow? It was God who planted it, and it was God who caused it to grow as well – and miraculously all in a day. So God's question to Jonah should really have been met with just one word, "No." He had no right to be angry about something that didn't belong to him.

While it might be easy for us The Church to look at Jonah and wonder how he could be so consumed with himself, his comforts, and rights, it's also important for us to ask ourselves the same question. If God were to remove the freedom, the comforts, the rights or any other blessing He brought into our lives, do we have the right to be angry with God about it? Did He not give it to us free of cost in the first place? And if to discipline us, He chose to remove it from us, do we have the right to question Him and/or grumble against Him? While the answer to that question might be a resounding, *"No,"* how often have we find ourselves questioning and grumbling just like Jonah did?

We have received God's grace free of cost, but that grace was meant to be shared with others as well and not to be kept to ourselves. Every so often the Lord might have to remove some 'plants' from our lives to wake us up to this reality that everything we have we have received. I'm reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 4:7**, where he said, *"And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"*

How unlike the apostle Paul who would rather die than see his Jewish brethren unsaved. We, like Jonah, have come a long way off-track – it's time to repent and seek the Lord's favor all over again before it's too late. Let's remember **1 Peter 4:17**, which says, *"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* It does not say that judgment begins for those outside the house of God, but rather, that it begins at the house of God – it begins with us who were saved by Christ. Jesus told several parables through which He explicitly warned those who claimed to belong to God but lived otherwise who would be more in danger of judgment than those outside the Kingdom of Family of God.

Let's stop and search ourselves as individuals and as churches and ask where we stand in our walk with the Lord and in our fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. Let's do all we can while we can, before the doors are closed and the freedom is taken away. If it calls for us to repent of self-absorption or of carelessness towards those who are

outside the house of God, let's repent, while we can, knowing that the same God who had mercy on the Ninevites will also have mercy on us His Church.

And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"
Though one would have imagined that the only response to a question like that from God himself would have resulted in a resounding *"No,"* from Jonah, that was not the case as it turns out. Jonah responds quite arrogantly and vehemently as well. He says that only does he have the right to be angry about the plant but goes on to say that he prefers death to life without the plant. Was Jonah not thinking straight? Did he not understand the question? Did he really believe what he was saying? We don't quite know what he was thinking, but it is obvious that he was vehement in his response to God. He feels totally in the right and doesn't hesitate to tell the Judge of all judges so.

How often we find ourselves doing the same thing with God. We question, we grumble, then we even threaten to take our own lives – the lives that we so freely were given by God. We did nothing to be created, and yet we sometimes feel well within our right to threaten to take our precious lives. It's like an insult to God who gave us life when someone threatens or attempts to take their life. No matter what the difficulty we face, taking one's life is never the solution to the problem.

In Jonah's case, he had no right to be angry and certainly had no right to want to die, because the One who gave him life had a purpose that had to be fulfilled before he passed away. So preferring to take his life was certainly not the right thing to prefer.

I'm reminded of the words by the Apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 6:20** – *"For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which is God's."* If we were bought with the price of Jesus' death on our behalf how dare one contemplate taking their life? We, The Church are to live each day taking good care of our bodies and our spirit as best we can and to use it to serve the Lord, by making Him known in every possible way to the world around, and eventually to fulfil The Great Commission to make disciples of all nations.

31 – The Divine Reasoning

Jonah 4:10-11 - *"But the Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not laboured, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night, and should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right and their left – and much livestock?'"*

"But the Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not laboured, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night…"
In our last devotion, we looked at how Jonah preferred death when the Lord removed the plant that offered him shade from the heat of the sun. We looked at how the Lord asked him whether he had a right to think the way he did about the plant and how Jonah had answered in the affirmative, adding that he even had the right to be angry to the point of preferring death to life.

Today we're going to look at the Lord's response to Jonah – a thought-provoking response that left him thinking. The Lord begins by recognising Jonah's feeling of pity on the plant and then goes on to remind him that he had done nothing to plant it or water it. In fact, it was God who miraculously caused the plant to grow overnight and it was God who caused it to wither overnight as well. All Jonah did was enjoy its shade. It's not sure whether Jonah had realised that fact earlier, but this was the perfect time for him to ponder this fact. If he had done nothing to cause the plant to grow, why was he so concerned when it withered?

Before we begin to condemn Jonah for his attitude, let each of us in The Church stop and search ourselves to check whether we have the same attitude that Jonah had. Do we receive blessings from God, with no work on our part? Yes, we do. The gift of Salvation is the best gift ever one can receive, and we who know the Lord have received this gift without doing anything to receive it.

Jesus lived the righteous life that all of us should have lived, but could not live, He bore the punishment of a shameful and cruel death that each of us should have borne on account of our sin, he was buried, went down into the heart of the earth, and rose again from the dead, and now makes this amazing gift of Salvation available to anyone who will just believe.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, *"What did we do?"* The answer is, *"Nothing."* Jesus did it all – we merely trusted in Him and received this gift free of cost. We've been forgiven of our sins, we've been adopted into the family of God as His children, possess the freedom to live a sin-free life, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives to help us live this amazing new life, we've received spiritual gifts so we may serve one another in the body of Christ. We've been given the eternal hope (assurance) that when we die we will go and live with the Lord forever, (if He does not return to take us home before we die). We've received a peace that surpasses human understanding, we've experienced and continue to experience God's amazing love, grace and mercy daily in our lives – if not for which we would have been history a long time back. We've received all this and more and all for doing nothing on our part, but for merely believing and trusting in what Jesus has done on our behalf.

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city,
The Lord goes on to tell Jonah that if he feels entitled to anger concerning a plant that he did not plant or take care of, how much more should God, who created the people of Nineveh. Jonah seemed to have forgotten that just as he was created in the image of God, so also were

the people of Nineveh created in that same image. Just as God loved him, the Lord loved the people of that great city of Nineveh.

The Lord had caused the plant to appear overnight and shrivel overnight just to make a point to Jonah that he was not entitled to feeling anger concerning the plant, and neither was he entitled to feel anger towards God over relenting from sending His wrath on the people of Nineveh. This is one of the many incidents of Experiential Learning (as we call it today) recorded in the Bible. Sometimes it calls for an activity or an experience to learn a lesson, much better than words alone can teach.

In which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right and their left – and much livestock?

When God said that Nineveh was a great city, He went on to give some information about the city as well. Firstly, it was a city that had one hundred and twenty thousand people living in it – not just a handful but quite a lot of people.

The Lord adds yet another detail about the people living in Nineveh – they *"cannot discern between their right and their left…"* While many believe that this refers to infants who have not yet learned to differentiate between right and left, I believe the Lord was referring to the fact that the people had become so sinful that they no longer knew what was right and what was wrong. In fact, this is how the CEV reads this verse – *"In that city of Nineveh there are more than a hundred twenty thousand people who cannot tell right from wrong…"*

The Lord adds yet another detail with which the book of Jonah concludes - *"And much livestock."* The Lord was not only concerned for the sinful people of Nineveh, but He was also concerned about the livestock – the cattle and sheep that He had created, which would also have died, had the Lord inflicted wrath on them. This is an interesting detail for us to bear in mind – the Lord cares for both humans as well as for animals because they were all created by Him. Humans of course were created in God's image, so we are far superior to animals, but animals were created to serve man in many ways. In other words, the Lord seems to be saying that there are a lot of people who are confused who live in Nineveh, and there are a lot of cattle and sheep as well.

Let's ask ourselves, The Church, the same question the Lord asked Jonah. Shouldn't God be concerned about the people around us whom He created in His image as He did us? Shouldn't He be concerned about the salvation of the souls of the people around us as He was concerned about ours when He sent Christ into the world? The answer is certainly a resounding, *"YES."* The question that seems unasked is, *"Shouldn't we care too?"*

What's our attitude as The Church, to the world around us today? Are we concerned that their souls should be saved just like ours was? Do we feel hatred and anger towards them because the Lord is being merciful and patient with them hoping they will come to repentance? Or are we completely indifferent to them, not caring whether they get saved or not, just as long as we get saved and spend eternity with the Lord? Firstly that's a very dangerous place to be and secondly, that's wishful thinking. We who are saved will be held accountable for what we did not do in sharing the love of God and the Gospel with the world around us, and there are umpteen passages where Jesus warned that such a careless attitude to the world around us will result in us spending eternity in hell, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. In

fact, that's what the parable of the talents is all about – not using what the Lord entrusted to our care to serve the Lord by continuing what the Lord began – making disciples of all nations.

Let's do all we can to befriend our non-Christian friends and genuinely love them – not seek to convert them without first loving them. Let's take time to share with them the Gospel that has transformed, and continues to transform our lives. We don't have much time; each of us has but a few years ahead – let's make the best of it. Let's not hold the good news to ourselves, because it was meant to share with the world around us.

The Lord in His love corrects us, The Church, at times to open our eyes to our selfish attitudes towards those who are outside, and in such times, instead of seeking the Lord all the more, loving Him and loving our neighbours as ourselves, so often we find ourselves raving and ranting at God, desiring death to discipline. We grumble against the numerous lockdowns and our inability to meet as churches, as though something terrible has happened to us and us alone. We forget that the whole world is in a worse situation because they face all this tragedy with no hope. We grumble against God's Divine and brief withdrawal, forgetting that one of the reasons for this was perhaps for our own discipline and for the opening of our eyes to the world around us. Let's look at this global pandemic as a wake-up call for us The Church, to get busy with what we were saved to do in the first place – make disciples of all nations.

I hope these devotions on the book of Jonah have been a blessing to you personally, as it has been to me as I wrote them. May we do all we can while we can to fulfil the purpose for which each of us was saved by the Lord Jesus.