Jonah

This month we are thinking in assembly about different animals from the Bible.

Last week we heard the story of Noah and the way he trusted God and God saved him and all the animals in the ark. I wonder did you see a rainbow during the week or even play with a toy Noah’s ark?

Today’s story is another story which has been told for thousands of years, a story Jesus would have heard when he was a boy, a story told long before the time of Jesus. Some of these oldest stories from the Bible were told long before there were books and of course long before TV or tablets. I can imagine mums and dads telling stories to their children, and storytellers telling stories around campfires on cold evenings. They are ancient stories

This is the story of Jonah and a large fish. But it’s not really just about the fish it’s about listening to what God wants us to do and how we should behave.

Do you always listen to your mum or dad and do what they say? Sometimes we think we know best and we do our own thing instead. Sometimes we realise too late that we made a bad choice.

This is what happened in the ancient story of Jonah. Except he wasn’t ignoring what his parents said- he ignored God.

One day God told Jonah to go to a city called Nineveh. He had a job to do - to tell the people living there to stop being bad and to follow God’s way.  This seems a straightforward task, but Jonah didn't want to do it.  He knew the people from Ninevah were bad and he thought that they should just be punished by God, no second chances!

So instead of listening to what God had said, Jonah thought he would run away.  He ran straight to the harbour where he found a boat that was about to leave. He paid his fare, went onto the boat and soon fell asleep. Soon after they left the shore, a very strong wind began to blow, it turned into a storm and after a while the boat was really being tossed around on the sea.  All the sailors were terrified, and they quickly threw their bags and boxes overboard to lighten the weight, hoping the boat wouldn’t capsize.

Who was to blame for the storm? There was one stranger on the boat. The captain went to find Jonah who was still sound asleep.  He said to Jonah, ‘How can you sleep?  Get up and pray to your god, maybe he can help us!’  The other sailors decided that the storm had to be Jonah's fault.  He must have done something wrong to make his god so angry.

Jonah realised then what was wrong. He told them ‘I am running away from something God asked me to do.  It is my fault this is happening.  If you throw me into the sea the storm will stop’.

The men didn't want to hurt Jonah by throwing him off the boat but the storm was getting worse by the minute.  Jonah was thrown into the sea and the storm immediately calmed and the sea became still.  Then, as the sailors watched a great fish came and swallowed up Jonah.

The story says that God actually sent the fish to save Jonah from drowning.  Jonah stayed in the fish for three days and three nights. While Jonah was inside the fish he did a lot of thinking and praying.  He asked God to forgive him for running away.  After the third day God told the fish to spit Jonah out onto dry land.  Then God told Jonah a second time to go to Nineveh and tell the people there to stop being bad.  This time Jonah obeyed God and left for Nineveh right away.

When Jonah got there he told the people what had happened to him.  He warned them that God said that they should stop doing bad things or in forty days the city and everything in it would be destroyed.  To Jonah's surprise the people listened to him and they prayed to God and they said sorry for all the bad things they had done.

Soon the king of Nineveh heard what was going on and he ordered that everyone to listen to God and to stop doing bad things.  And when God saw that the people of Ninevah were living God’s way he felt love for them and did not destroy their city.

Jonah had learned a lesson too. He needed to follow God and to listen to what he told him to do. The story showed that God took care of Jonah from the start and the big fish was part of that way of caring for Jonah, surprising as that is.

I can imagine Jesus as a small boy loving that story. He lived near to a lake where lots of small fish lived but would never have seen big fish or whales. I’m sure he often asked for that exciting story to be told to him just like you might like stories about whales or dolphins. If you watch a TV show with whales or other large fish on it, or if you are lucky enough to see them in real life you can remember the ancient story about Jonah and the message of the story that it is important to listen to God and to live God’s way.

Our first prayer today thinks about how hard it is sometimes to follow God’s commands.

**A prayer for help**

Lord Jesus, when you gave us the order to love each other, you knew it wouldn’t be easy. Help us when we find it difficult to obey your command.

When we feel cross or irritable, help us to be patient.

.When we are tempted to say or do something unkind, help us to change.

When we are jealous of others, help us to be thankful.

When we are angry or resentful, give us your peace.

Help us to see the good in others, and help us to live as your children in the world. Amen.

Last week in our prayers you thought about your favourite animal. Can you think of your favourite fish or shark or whale before I say this prayer and when I leave a gap think of it or say its name in your heads.

We thank you God for the wonderful things you created:

for the animals, big and small,

for the oceans, deep and blue and the fish and whales and sharks that live in it especially …………………

for the land, green and fertile,

for the sky and all the birds of the air,

for the sun that shines and cheers us up.

for the people that God made,

Help us look after this wonderful earth. Amen.

Dear God, creator of the wind, the sky, the land and sea,

what a wonderful world you have given us.

Thank you for the rain, so we have water to drink.

Thank you for the land, so we have food to eat.

Thank you for the sun, so we have light and life on earth.

Help us to treat the world you have given us with care and respect.

May we, the children of this school, waste less and conserve more.

May we, the children of the world, live in harmony with each other and our precious planet. Amen.

And finally a prayer for this new day

Lord, as we enter into a new day, may you bless us with your presence. May we feel your guidance and love. May you guide us to make good choices and encourage us to be the best versions of ourselves. Let us be thankful for all of the people involved in our education and for those who support us every day. Amen.