

**A Refuge for Us**  
**Mark 1:14-20; Jonah 3; Psalm 62:5-12**

**Psalm 62:5-12**

<sup>5</sup>For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

<sup>6</sup>He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;  
 I shall not be shaken.

<sup>7</sup>On God rests my deliverance and my honor;  
 my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

<sup>8</sup>Trust in him at all times, O people;  
 pour out your heart before him;  
 God is a refuge for us.

<sup>9</sup>Those of low estate are but a breath,  
 those of high estate are a delusion;  
 in the balances they go up;  
 they are together lighter than a breath.

<sup>10</sup>Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery;  
 if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

<sup>11</sup>Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this:  
 that power belongs to God,  
<sup>12</sup>and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.  
 For you repay to all according to their work.

**Jonah 3:1-5, 10**

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." <sup>3</sup>So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. <sup>4</sup>Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" <sup>5</sup>And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth...

<sup>10</sup>When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways,

God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

### **Mark 1:14-20**

<sup>14</sup>Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, <sup>15</sup>and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

<sup>16</sup>As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

<sup>17</sup>And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." <sup>18</sup>And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup>As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup>Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

### The Sermon

*For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
for my hope is from God, who alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.  
God is a refuge for us.*

For those who are old enough to remember the weeks and months following the 9/11 attacks back in 2001, do you remember how it took quite some time before we felt like we could laugh again? For days and days, laughter was not even something we thought about.

And then, gradually, we started to find our footing again. Mayor Giuliani famously stood with Lorne Michaels, the producer of Saturday Night Live, for their first show after the tragedy, and after a somber opening, in a scripted line, Lorne asked the mayor, "Can we be funny?" and Rudy said, after 35 years of that comedy show being on the air, "Why start now?"

It wasn't an uproariously funny line because we weren't really "there" yet, but we were getting there, and it helped.

There's an online satirical newspaper—not fake news, not a political diatribe; just a goofy, silly satirical version of a newspaper designed only to be funny. I won't say the name of it because they occasionally use profanity and I know none of us here is familiar with profanity.

Late in 2001, they printed a totally satirical, silly story, written in their trademark deadpan, serious journalistic style, and the joke was that in order to reassure the public and keep us vigilant, enormous sirens were being installed in all major cities across the country that would blare all day and all night.

They quoted—again, this is total fiction and just meant to be comedy—a government official supposedly saying that these 130-decibel sirens would make conversation impossible within a 200-yard range, serving as a helpful reminder to citizens to stay on the lookout. "Please note, though," says the official, "that this is merely a precautionary measure, so go about your lives as normal."<sup>i</sup>

It's just a satire, pure silliness, designed to create a farcical mental image that might help to coax a smile in an agonizingly fraught and tragic time.

Do you ever feel like warning sirens are going off all day long, in the midst of which, you're just supposed to keep trying to live a normal life?

I am in part referring to the alarmist industry which is specifically designed to make sure people are riled up and agitated. It's like picking an ice cream flavor: no matter what your political persuasion is, or what your social or even theological views are, there's a media outlet for you—or two, or three, or 100—designed to keep you angry and scared and just enough on edge that you'll be sure to stay tuned for the next program and tune in again to the same show tomorrow.

But the screaming klaxons are not just on our TVs and internet and other external sources.

Sometimes it feels like pretty much everywhere we go—literally, or in cyberspace, or in our own imaginations—alarm bells and sirens seem to blare from all over the place.

Do you ever find yourself in need of refuge?

And what would that feel like, if you had it? What would it look like?

And beyond what it would feel like, what would it mean?

When Jesus extends the invitation to Simon and Andrew and James and John, he's inviting them from the life they knew to something...not alien and foreboding, but something *more*.

I wonder if their apparent eagerness to follow may have had something to do with their need, each in their own lives and in their own ways, to find that elusive something that would be, for them, a refuge.

Refugees by definition are displaced people: looking for a chance, either to start a new and more productive life, or just to be able to continue to live—following their hope like magi following a star.

Without trying to reduce the plight of the world's millions of desperate, displaced persons to a sermon illustration, is there some part of you that sometimes feels like a *refugee*—either actively seeking, or just quietly longing for, refuge?

What would that look like?

Serious scholarship has suggested that the book of Jonah may have been written as comedy—not nonsense comedy, but using the medium of a

story, *told with humor*, to convey theological truths.

In reality, Nineveh was, for example, more like a village than a “great city,” and there are a lot of other indicators that there would have been some wry smiles among those who first listened to the telling of its four chapters.

One part of the story that wasn’t part of today’s reading is that when God saw the people’s repentance and decided not to destroy Nineveh after all, Jonah was deeply, bitterly disappointed; he had set up what I picture as more or less a lawn chair on a hill overlooking the city to watch the spectacle of God’s wrath being poured out on the city.

He gets so down in the dumps about it that he thinks he’d rather die than to see all those people “get away with it.”

And God uses that moment to calm Jonah and eventually ask him, rhetorically, “Don’t you think I should be concerned about Nineveh, ‘that great city,’ in which there are more than 120,000 people who don’t know their right hand from their left? And a lot of cows?” (That is literally the last word of the book.)

God is a refuge for us, says Psalm 62.

People of both “low” and “high estate” are “a breath and a delusion” respectively—i.e., neither amounts to much on their own.

But God is a refuge for us all.

When Jesus calls the disciples and promises that pretty soon instead of fishing for a bounty at the marketplace, they’ll be fishing for people—inviting others, just as he invited them, to follow him into a way of being truly and fully human, a life in which being fully who you are doesn’t require you to exclude others. Quite the opposite, as a matter of fact.

God is a refuge for us all.

John O'Donohue wrote this poem which is simply called "Beannacht," or "Blessing."<sup>ii</sup>

On the day when  
the weight deadens  
on your shoulders  
and you stumble,  
may the clay dance  
to balance you.

And when your eyes  
freeze behind  
the grey window  
and the ghost of loss  
gets in to you,  
may a flock of colours,  
indigo, red, green,  
and azure blue  
come to awaken in you  
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays  
in the [small boat] of thought<sup>iii</sup>  
and a stain of ocean  
blackens beneath you,  
may there come across the waters  
a path of yellow moonlight  
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,  
may the clarity of light be yours,  
may the fluency of the ocean be yours,  
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.

And so may a slow  
wind work these words  
of love around you,  
an invisible cloak  
to mind your life.

Do you ever find yourself in need of refuge?

What would that feel like, if you had it? What would it look like?

And beyond what it would feel like, what would it mean?

*For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress;  
I shall not be shaken.*

*On God rests my deliverance and my honor;  
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.*

*Trust in him at all times;  
pour out your heart before him;  
God is a refuge for us.*

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<sup>i</sup> [Orange Alert Sirens To Blow 24 Hours A Day In Major Cities \(theonion.com\)](https://www.theonion.com/orange-alert-sirens-to-blow-24-hours-a-day-in-major-cities)

<sup>ii</sup> In John O'Donohue, *Echoes of Memory* (New York: Three Rivers, 1994)

<sup>iii</sup> Orig. "in the *currach* of thought"