Jonah 4 – The Protester, 24th June 2018   Go4th

Last of 4 weeks on Jonah – fascinating and profound book, with hidden depths. Key thing is to see round the whale and we've done that!

Last chapter is really key to whole story – it's only here that we finally understand Jonah's mind. Why did Jonah run away at the start of ch1, when God gave him his mission? Ch4 tells us and it's not primarily because he was scared, or lacked faith in God or his abilities or because it wasn't in Israel's best interests – the usual things we think.

It's because he can't accept how merciful God is. Look at what he says to God in v2: READ v2 – 'this is exactly what I said would happen God', like nagging relative - you can't help yourself, can you?

It's fascinating isn't it? Why does Jonah feel like this? It certainly makes his journey to Nineveh more ambiguous, doesn't it? Presumably he was hoping the Ninevites wouldn't repent, so he could sit and watch God's judgement rain down on them, like he apparently does in v5. He really did want to be the prophet of doom.

It is one of the great biblical acts of forgetfulness. Here was Yahweh's prophet conveniently forgetting just how often God had spared Israel over the centuries. He'd even forgotten how God had spared him just a few weeks ago!

It's astonishing – but maybe it's a lesson which never stops being true. It's so easy to turn God's love into 'us' and 'them'. To create barriers which assume that God will welcome some and not others. To assume that he can't be merciful to certain groups of people.

But God is not us, as we say in the prayer book service every week, his nature is always to have mercy. He can't help himself! That's good news for us (as we looked at last week), but also for our world.

As we go out again today to be good news to our community, let's always carry with us that deep sense that he loves everyone, all those people we'll meet and bless today.

And my prayer is that some of those people will get a glimpse of that love God has for them, through us. Amen.