



A delightfull readable yet profound survey of the way stories inform our faith and values, and are essential to our Christian witness. Ralph Milton at his best.

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Jonah

a fantasy based on the book of Jonah by Ralph Milton

We totally miss the meaning of the story unless we realize this. The story of Jonah is a comedy.

The book of Jonah is not history and it's not legend. It is a funny parable written to get the Hebrews laughing at themselves so they'd realize that the God they worshiped was the God of the whole world. It is full of laughter, much of which is lost in translation. This re-telling is in the spirit of the original in the Bible.

You might find it useful to check out the chapter on humour in my book The Gift of Story.

This drama was first presented as part of the worship service at First United Church in Kelowna, BC. It was done as readers' theatre, and so required a lot of rehearsal to milk all the meaning out of the lines.

You can see this presentation on the [StoryFest](#) videos found on the Wood Lake web site, or simply click on that link.

If you present this play, adapt it to the resources you have available. The musician is not completely necessary, but does add a nice touch. Where you see the word "sting" that means a single, sharp cord.

The narrator and boat person were played by one person using two different voices, but it could as easily be done by two people. But God and the Guardian Angel should be played by the same person (male or female) using two very different voices. Duration: about 12 min.

Older persons will sense that this is a bit like the old radio drama, and they'll be right on. I cut my dramatic teeth acting in, writing and producing radio soap operas. Back in the days when radio was king.

Cast:

Narrator & Boat Person

God & Guardian Angel

Jonah

Organist or other musician

MUSIC: ORGAN THEME, GREIG, HALL OF THE MOUNTAIN KING AS LOW AS POSSIBLE FADE TO BG AT END OF SECOND SEQUENCE AND SLOWLY OUT.

NARR: Listen up folks. This is a parable – written by an ancient story-teller, to help the Hebrew people understand that the God they worshipped was also the God of the Ninevites whom they hated. This is the story of Jonah –

JONAH: That's me.

NARR: Of God, who sounds like this...

GOD: (DECLAMATORY) I am the God of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob....

NARR: (INTERRUPTING) And of Jonah's guardian angel. Who sounds like this.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: (SQUEAKY NASEL) Well, there's no guardian angel in the Bible story, but a schmuk like Jonah really needs a guardian angel, right?

NARR: Yeah, This is the story of Jonah, son of Amittai!

JONAH: And the whale. Don't forget the whale.

NARR: This is the story of Jonah and the fish.

JONAH: The whale. The story of Jonah and the whale.

NARR: Shhh. Be quiet, Jonah. It was a fish. The Bible distinctly says it was a big fish, and a whale is not a fish.

JONAH: So what is it then? It swims in the water. Things that swim in the water are fish.

NARR: Be quiet, Jonah. I'll tell you when it's your turn to talk.

JONAH: OK! OK! (LOOKS OFF INTO DISTANCE FEELING HURT)

NARR: (IN WHATEVER ACCENT YOU LIKE) And then later in the drama, there's the guy who runs the boat, and that's me when I sound like this.

NARR: (CLEARS THROAT, THEN BACK TO ORIGINAL VOICE) Now the word of God came to Jonah –

MUSIC: STING

NARR: pay attention Jonah – The word of God came to Jonah saying ---

MUSIC: STING

GOD: (DECLAMATORY) Arise! Go at once to Nineveh --

MUSIC: STING

GOD: -- that great city, and cry out against it. For their wickedness is come up before me!

MUSIC: STING

JONAH: Who? Me?

GOD: Arise! Go forthwith to Nineveh, that great city and.....

MUSIC: STING

JONAH: (INTERUPTING) Yeah, Yeah, I got it, but it's like ... I'm kinda, like, tied up right now and it's a great honour to be chosen as a prophet and all that, but like I've got a sore leg and like...

GOD: Jonah! Go to that great city of Nineveh and cry out against it, because...

MUSIC: STING

JONAH: Well, like, couldn't you find somebody....

GUARDIAN ANGEL: (STAGE WHISPER) Do what God tells you Jonah. You don't have a choice.

JONAH: OK, so I'm going. I'm going already. (SINGS) I'm going off to Nineveh, Nineveh, Ninevor, tell them not to sin no more..

GA: Jonah, Nineveh is in the other direction.

JONAH: Who asked you? (CALLING) Hey! Hey you down there. Which way you going in that boat of yours.

BOAT PERSON: (CALLING BACK) Tarshish. We're headed for Tarshish which is about as way, back of beyond you'd ever want to go.

JONAH: Suits me just fine. A one-way ticket, please.

GA: Jonah, you're supposed to be going to Nineveh.

JONAH: And you're supposed to mind your own business.

GA: You have to do what God tells you to do!

JONAH: (MOCKING) You have to do what God tells you to do. (ANGRILY) Look, I know them Nenevites. They come over here and they beat up on us all the time. They're big and they're mean, and this God of yours wants me to stand on my hind legs in the middle of the city and preach at them and tell them how rotten they are. They'd cut me into pieces and have me for breakfast. I'm headed for Tarshish where God can't find me.

GA: You'll be sorry!

MUSIC: DRAGNET STING

BP: All aboard! All aboard for Tarshish.

JONAH: Bye bye God. Bye bye Guardian angel.

GA: Oh, I'm coming with you. You should be pleased!

JONAH: (SARCASTICALLY) Oh, I'm delighted! Damn!

MUSIC: DRAGNET STING 2

NARR: But God hurled a great wind against the sea, and such a mighty storm came up that the boat tossed around and threatened to break up.

MUSIC: DRAGNET STING 3

BP: (TINY VOICE) Help.

NARR: And where was Jonah?

GA: Guess.

NARR: Jonah was way down in the hold, sound asleep.

JONAH: (SNORING)

BP: Why are you down here snoring away? Get up and pray to your god.

JONAH: (WAKING UP) Wha...pray to my god...my God lives way over in Jerusalem.

GA: Wrong, wrong, Jonah baby. God doesn't say much, but guess what's causing the mother of all storms out there?

JONAH: God?

MUSIC: DRAGNET THEME 4

GA: Bingo. Now get up like the nice man said and tell the folks topside what a schmuk you are.

JONAH: OK, OK. Ahem. (PROJECTING) Well, all you nice boat people, I guess I have to tell you who's makin' all them waves...it's just that the great God Yahweh is just a bit PO'd with me...;

BP: Yah....who?

JONAH: No. Yahweh. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all them guys.

BP: This Yahweh is just the god of the all the Hebrew guys?

JONAH: Well, yeah. So?

BP: Then who's the god of the women and children and all the folks who aren't Hebrews? Like us?

JONAH: Well, ah...yeah...ah, no, ah...

GA: Tell them where God is sending you.

JONAH: Yeah, this God Yahweh is kind of soft headed...

GA: Soft hearted!!!)

JONAH: OK, soft hearted and wants me to go to Nineveh and preach at them, and tell them to repent, and stuff like that, and can you imagine what them Ninevites would do to a guy that comes into town telling them to get their act together and be nice? (MAKES THROAT SLITTING SIGN)

GA: Tell 'em to toss you overboard.

JONAH: What.....? , ahh...I guess I'd better disembark at this point, or you and your boat are toast.

BP. C'mon, we're miles from shore.

GA (INSISTING) Tell 'em to toss you overboard!

JONAH: I know that, I know that... Sheesh! A guy could drown out there.

GA: Tell 'em to toss you. Or you'll all drown!

JONAH: Eeeee! I may need a little encouragement. You're gonna hafta toss me.

BP: If you insist.

MUSIC: TOP TO BOTTOM GLISSANDO & DISCORD

ALL: SPLASH & GURGLE.

NARR: So the sailors tossed Jonah overboard, and the waves stopped and the water became smooth as glass. But Jonah didn't drown. God sent a very large fish – an extra-large fish – a humongous fish big enough to swallow Jonah whole. Without chewing.

ALL: SOUND EFFECT: GULP.

JONAH: It's dark in here.

NARR: Jonah was all alone. Not even his guardian angel was with him.

JONAH: It smells like sardines in here.

NARR: And so -- in the belly of the fish Jonah suddenly got religion.

MUSIC: IN SOFTLY IN BG: NEARER MY GOD TO THEE, WITH AS MUCH VIBRATO AS POSSIBLE.

JONAH: (IN QUAVERING "RELIGIOUS" TONES) Oh God, I know you can hear me, even here in the belly of this fish, and you know I am in danger of being digested, and I know why you have had me thrown into the sea, and Oh God, my life is starting to drain out of me and I can feel those digestive juices working on my toes, and up my leg, to the top of my leg and...and no...please fish, not that....and I promise, oh I promise, God, to do anything you tell me, anything, anything, only don't let me be digested by this fish because I promise to be a good boy...I really...

ALL: SOUND EFFECT: BARFING

MUSIC: GLISS BOTTOM UP TO DISCORD

NARR: And so Jonah was barfed up onto the beach.

GA: You need a shower, man, you smell like a dead fish.

JONAH: (ANGRILY) So what do you expect, idiot? I spend three days getting half-digested in the guts of an overgrown guppy, and you want me to smell like a friggen petunia?

GOD: Jonah! Get up! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim unto them the message that I will give you. Go!”

MUSIC: GRIEG, SLOWLY AND QUIETLY IN BG.

JONAH: I’m going God. Look at me. See I’m going, just like you told me. I really planned to go all along, that trip to Tarshish ... I thought I’d take the scenic route, you know...but now I’m on my way. I really am. And no more fish, OK?

MUSIC: FADE OUT

NARR: So Jonah went to Nineveh, that great city, three days journey across ... (SURPRISED & OUT OF CHARACTER) that was 60 miles. That’s 96 kilometers.... Hey who wrote this story anyway, there were no cities that size way back then.

GA: (STAGE WHISPER) Stick to the script. That’s what it says in the Bible.

NARR: Sorry. So Jonah went to the centre of the city and proclaimed God’s message.

JONAH: In forty days Nineveh will be overthrown! (SLIGHT PAUSE) There!

GA: That’s it?

JONAH: That’s it.

GA: That’s got to be the shortest sermon on record.

JONAH: Well, that’s what God asked for. I always do what God tells me. And now we get to the fun part. I’m going to go sit up on top of that hill just outside the city, and watch God turn all these dirty Ninevites into mincemeat.

GA: Don’t count on it!

NARR: When the people of Nineveh heard Jonah's message, they proclaimed a fast, they were sorry for their sins, even the King got converted, and everyone prayed to God and the whole city decided to lead a new kind of life.

MUSIC: TWO HALLELUJAH'S FROM HANDEL

JONAH: How do y'like that? Pretty good sermon, eh?

NARR: When God saw that the people of Nineveh had changed from their evil ways, God decided not to destroy them after all.

MUSIC: FIRST LINE OF JESUS LOVES ME, MELODY LINE ONLY IN UPPER OCTAVE.

JONAH: What? What? After all the trouble I've gone to? I pay for expensive passage on a boat and I get tossed overboard, and I get half-digested by a smelly fish and I preach an eloquent sermon to all those Ninevites and then you decide to let them off the hook. I shoulda known. I shoulda known. You're like what all them priests in the temple say, you're "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" and all that stuff. So I'm finished. I'm done. I'm just going to sit here on this hill and die. Just watch me.

NARR: Then God made a plant grow up, to shade Jonah from the hot, desert sun.

JONAH: Nice plant. Nice shade. Feels nice and cool.

NARR: But the next day God sent a worm that ate the plant, and the whole thing shriveled and died.

MUSIC: DISCORD STING

JONAH: What happened to the plant? God, what's up here? You take away my nice shade plant and I'm sitting here in the hot sun again. Well, I'm just going to die. Right now. Just watch me.

GOD: Jonah, Jonah, you are angry about the plant?

JONAH: Damn right I am. And I'm mad enough to just die. Just watch me.

GOD: All right Jonah. Gloves off. Reality time. Listen up and listen hard.

MUSIC: FANFARE, AS AT RACE TRACK

GOD (WITH INCREASING INTENSITY): Jonah, who made the world?

JONAH: Ah, you did.

GOD: And who made you?

JONAH: Ah, you did.

GOD: Who made the city of Jerusalem?

JONAH: Ah, you did.

GOD: And I love Jerusalem. Do you believe that?

JONAH: Ah, yes sir...ah madam....ahhhh whatever.

GOD: And I love all the people in Jerusalem, right?

JONAH: Ah, yes, Of course. Ahh for sure.

GOD: Jonah! Who made Nineveh?

JONAH: That's a good question, ah, not sure..ah...

GOD: Who made the world?

JONAH: Well, you asked me that already, it was you of course...of course...ha
ha

GOD: Then who made Nineveh..

JONAH: I guess it musta been you..ah...but why?

GOD: Can you believe that I love all that I have made?

JONAH: Heh heh, well you wouldn't make it if you didn't love it.

GOD: Can you believe that I love Nineveh?

JONAH: Well, ahhhh, it's full of some really strange people and they do bad things and...

GOD: Can you believe that I love Nineveh and all the people in it? Even the bad ones. Even the ones who come and slaughter people in Jerusalem?

JONAH: Oh no...you don't love them, they're bad. Bad. Bad.

GOD: Jonah I love all that I have made...

JONAH: Yeah, but for sure not them....

GOD: Jonah, I made Nineveh!

JONAH: I understand that, but not...

GOD: Jonah, I love what I create.

JONAH: I got that, but you couldn't....

GOD: I love all the people...all the people of Jerusalem, all the people of Nineveh, and I even love you Jonah, which is a little hard, sometimes. Have you got that into your thick skull Jonah?

JONAH: Well, I can see where you might...

GOD: Jonah, I love you, I love the people of Jerusalem, and I love the people of Nineveh. Get it?

JONAH: Got it.

GOD: Good.

MUSIC: HALLELUJAH REPRISE.

NARR: And so ends the story of Jonah and the whale.

GA: (STAGE WHISPER) It was a fish.

NARR: Sorry. So ends the story of Jonah and the fish.

MUSIC: REPRISE GRIEG, THAT MORPHS IN BG TO JESUS LOVES ME IN SAME LOW REGISTER.

NARR: And the moral of the story, boys and girls....the moral of the story is that God loves the bad guys as much as the good guys. All the people you don't like, all the people who annoy you, all the people you hate, the people you would like to have wiped off the face of the earth, just like those awful Ninevites. Any colour, and race, any creed, any gender, any size. God loves everyone. Even a schmuck like Jonah.

So there. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

MUSIC: FULL UP TO END OF VERSE.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
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