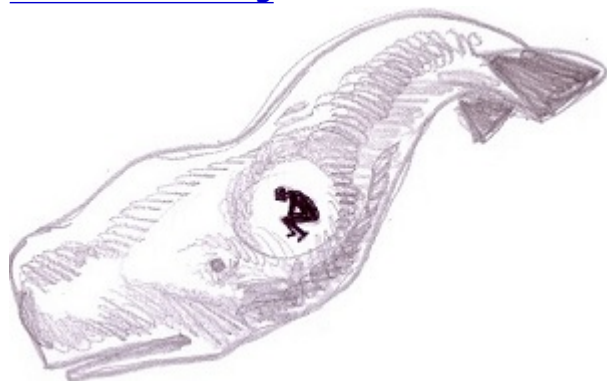


[Spirituality](#)
[Pencil Preaching](#)



by Pat Marrin

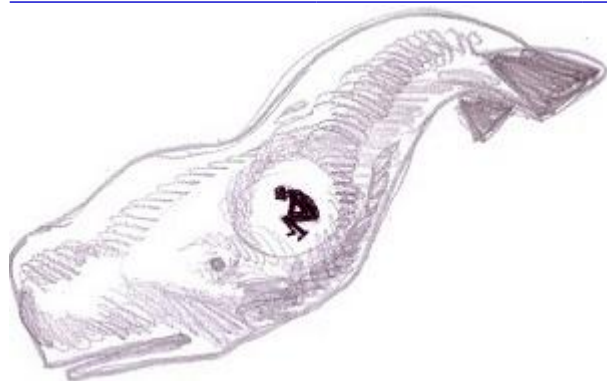
[View Author Profile](#)
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

[**Join the Conversation**](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

July 19, 2020

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)



“When you do these things, shall I be deaf to it?” (Ps 50:21).

Micah 6:1-4, 6-8; Matt 12: 38-42

The story of Jonah was about repentance, and Jesus uses it to remind his contemporaries that they, too, needed to repent. The Prophet Jonah was sent by God to Nineveh, a city synonymous with evil, to give it a chance to repent. As unlikely as this seemed, the mighty capital of Assyria, Israel's great enemy, did repent and was spared. Israel, God's own chosen nation, should have known better and repented quickly.

Another sign within the sign of Jonah compared the prophet's time in the belly of the whale with Jesus' three days in the tomb. This sign only sharpened the call to repentance. A messenger back from the dead had warned Israel of coming disaster, but the nation had ignored the sign and been destroyed during the Jewish-Roman war that leveled the city and the temple and drove the population from the region. Matthew, who witnessed this disaster from Antioch, where his Gospel was composed, highlighted the tragedy of Jerusalem's failure to recognize Jesus. He was as God's prophet, greater than Jonah and greater than Solomon, whose wisdom had guided the queen of the south.

These stories and images may seem distant to us in time and relevance, but the lesson is embedded in history and the theme of repentance is always relevant. God's Word invites us to reflect on the current crises facing our world on so many fronts: Climate change, the plight of the poor, the threat of endless war, political corruption and global disparity made worse by the pandemic and financial instability.

Jesus rebuked his critics for asking for a sign, as though some extraordinary, celestial signal was needed over and above the obvious warnings to get them to change. Crisis serves to awaken us, and breakdown can be breakthrough if we know how to read the signs of the times. For example, what more is needed to convince the world that climate change is real, that wealth inequality and social injustice cannot be sustained indefinitely, that millions of desperate people cannot be constrained from taking desperate measures to survive?

Each issue has its prophets, among them Pope Francis, environmentalists, scientists, activists, advocates for the poor, for legal reform, racial justice, political change, human rights. The United States has lost two important voices in the past year, Elijah Cummings and John Lewis. We celebrate their lives of service, but will we hear and do their message?

The Prophet Micah grew exasperated with the failures of his contemporaries, weary of reminding them that God had blessed them with freedom and prosperity, only to be met with their false piety and social indifference to the poor, the alien resident, the laborer. God asked so little, and to recount it in the simplest terms, Micah summarized it for them, and for us:

You have been told, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you. Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God (6:8).

Advertisement