

Our friends Sam and Janet with their young family spent 15 years serving God in the desert regions of Pakistan. Giving up careers as an engineer and speech pathologist to go to Bible College. To be equipped for the work God would send them to. Twenty-five years later, at an age when most people have retired, they lead a large multicultural church in inner city Melbourne. Our young missionary partner left the security of Australia, a career as a doctor to serve Jesus in the Middle East. Parents with young families going to isolated towns in outback Australia to grow churches. What is their motivation? The answer in the book of Jonah. Revealed to us by the main character. Not the big fish. Not Jonah. The living God. The missionary God. The God whose heart aches for the world he perfectly created. The world now broken by the consequences of foolish decision making. By human beings made in the image of God. The pinnacle of God's creation. Foolishly believing fullness of life comes by living independently of God. That self-rule more lifegiving than God's rule. The consequences of that foolishness, our foolishness, plain for all to see. Disorder and chaos, amongst the beauty and wonder. The whole of creation impacted. Most tragically in dysfunction, pain, emptiness in human lives. Australia the best country in the world. Yet eight people a day take their own lives. Domestic violence is rampant. An average of forty women and twelve men die annually at the hands of their partner. Alcohol and drug abuse sowing a lifetime of mental and physical health issues in our loved ones. From early teenage years onwards. Project self-rule a dismal failure. God takes seriously human rebellion. Punishing evil because of the damage it does to his world. To those who say no to him he says no to them. The consequence: separation from him now and forever. But in his great love and grace the missionary God offers rescue, redemption, restoration. Sending Jesus, his one and only Son, into the world. To die in our place. Taking the punishment for our rebellion. Forgiving us and reconciling us to our Creator. Jesus rose to life again as the king of the whole world. Jesus ascended to heaven advocating for us before the living God. Jesus will return one day to judge those who continue to ignore God's rule. To welcome his forgiven friends into his forever kingdom. The missionary God revealed to us in our series on the book of Jonah. Rescuing lost people from different backgrounds and places. A Jewish prophet, sailors from many countries, citizens of an Assyrian city. The strategy of the missionary God. Calling people to be missionary people. Listen to the Bible. Paul, one of those missionary people explaining God's strategy. *'All this*

is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.' **2 Corinthians 5:18-20** All Christians part of this strategy. Saved by God. Called as his co-workers. Instruments in saving others who become co-workers too. What humbles me most. God invites fragile, weak, stubborn but forgiven people like me, and you, to work with him in preparing the world for eternity. Paul, speaking again, *'But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.'* **2 Corinthians 4:7** In the book of Jonah we also are introduced to Jonah. A jar of clay. Running away from God's call on his life. Angry at God's grace poured out on people he deems unworthy of God's love. Focussing on things that pass away while neglecting matters of eternal significance. A prophet of God without the heart of God. Being a jar of clay did not disqualify him as a co-worker. Jonah an instrument in bringing thousands to saving faith. Honoured in today's Assyrian church in Iraq as the one who brought the gospel to their ancestors. Fellow jars of clay. The story of Jonah teaches: our flaws, weaknesses, failures do not disqualify us from being a co-worker of the living God. Tear up your resignation letter. Give up using your unworthiness as an excuse. If you are on the run like Jonah, stop running away. Start serving again. Be encouraged. The missionary God who works through us also works in us. Making us more like Jesus. So others see Jesus in us. So the character of Jesus shapes our serving as co-workers. Like Jesus. Bringing lost people home to God. Deeply, genuinely loving others. Laying down our lives for them. With single-minded commitment pursuing the will of our heavenly Father. Jesus says, *'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.'* **John 4:34** Sisters and brothers, fellow jars of clay, are you willing to follow Jesus with the heart of God wherever he sends you? Are you willing to allow God to work through you and in you? We ought to respond in a new way to those questions each day. The testimony of Paul. *'But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ.'* **Philippians 3:7-8** Words worth putting on the fridge, in the front of your Bible, on the bathroom mirror. The missionary God

sought you out and saved you. In response be passionate full-time servants of Christ. Because God has unfinished business in the world and in us. We are not servants of Christ in isolation. But in fellowship with one another as members of a local church. You are not at Northern Beaches Anglicans by accident. But by God's design. We are a local church learning to be missionary people under the rule of the missionary God. God may or may not send us overseas like Sam and Janet or M. He may or may not send us to far flung places in Australia like Roger and Amanda, Glen and Beth. He does send us into a harvest field. Red Rock to Moonee, Sapphire Beach, Coffs Harbour, Sawtell. The harvest fields in which we live. God is speaking to us through the book of Jonah. One thread woven throughout the story. The missionary God working with flawed missionary people. To prepare the world for eternity. How will you fulfil your part in God's strategy? What does being a co-worker with God look like for you? What are you prepared to consider loss for the sake of Christ? How are you guarding and growing a Christlike heart? The unfolding impact of COVID 19 sharpens the importance of these questions and our mission as a church. Despite all the damaging consequences of COVID 19. The deepest human need: reconciliation with God. In jars of clay, like you and me, God places the treasure of the gospel. By every means available may we be ambassadors of Christ on the Northern Beaches and beyond, to the very ends of the earth.