

The Play

JONAH AND WELLY

Feast

3rd Sunday / Year B

Characters

Narrator
A sailor

Jonah
Welly the Whale

Props

A ship.
A coin.
A whale.
A plant.



Suggestions

The character of Welly was inspired by Robin Williams. If there is a natural comic in your acting troupe, this is the part for him or her. The action itself is simple. You can set up some chairs for the ship. The sailor begins near the ship. You can create the whale out of a large box or use a table with a cloth over it. The whale can be stationary, or, if you want to involve more people, have a few volunteers make the whale "swim." Welly's voice can come from behind whatever you use. We made one of those rolled up newspaper trees for the plant that withers. Jonah is invisible inside of Welly for a good portion of the story so there should be a microphone inside of Welly's belly. The nature of the story and the lack of action dictate that the characterization of the voices should be over the top, almost cartoonish.

Running Time

15 minutes.

NARRATOR

*Jonah enters.
He stand center
with his back to the
congregation,
listening to God.
His first line is
delivered in this
position.*

You know the story of Jonah: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah, saying, 'Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me.' " Jonah said:

JONAH

Yes, my God, anything you say, my God, whatever you want, my God. I am your serrvant. I'll go to those Ninny's and kick some . . .

NARRATOR

But Jonah was really thinking:

JONAH

He turns around.

I've had it with this God. God is so fickle. Sure, now God's angry with them, but as soon as I go there and tell them to repent, this God will forgive them. Why should I waste my time. I'm out of here.

NARRATOR

So Jonah went to Joppa to get on a ship out of Tarshish.

JONAH

*He goes to the ship.
Jonah and the sailor
mime a discussion
about gaining
passage on the ship.*

I'm going to get as far from this God as I can.

NARRATOR

Pause for an answer.

*They shake the ship
and roll around as
if in a storm.*

The only problem was that you can't run away from God. God loved Jonah and didn't want to lose him. So God decided to shake him up a bit, do a number on his head. Does anybody know what God did?

That's right, there was a great storm on the sea. The wind started blowing. There was a huge wave, like a tidal wave, and the sailors were afraid.

JONAH

*The sailor stares at
a sheepish Jonah.*

OK, OK, I'm running away from my God. I'm a Hebrew and our God is hard to please.

SAILOR You're running away from God?

NARRATOR Then do you know what they did? They drew lots . . . well . . . in this version of the story . . . they flipped a coin.

SAILOR Heads or tails?
The sailor flips the coin.

JONAH Heads?

SAILOR Tails.

NARRATOR So they threw Jonah's tail overboard and then what happened? You're right. A great fish swallowed Jonah.
The sailor throws Jonah overboard. He mimes splashing and drowning and is finally "swallowed" by the whale.

JONAH Where am I? It's so dark in here.

WELLY Hang on for a minute; I'll breach and maybe you can get some light through my blow hole.

JONAH Oh thanks What! Is someone speaking to me?

WELLY Speaking, no. We are communicating telepathically. You're hearing me in your brain. You know, a kind of mammalian mind meld. We are both mammals, you know . . . people and whales.

JONAH What are you talking . . . I mean telepathing . . . about?

WELLY Forget it for now. You're Jonah, aren't you? God told me you'd be stopping by for a few days. Running away aren't you. Tsk, tsk. This is where they all end up, all God's preachers who've had it . . . you know burn-out, stress. God can be really difficult to get a handle on. Jonah, you needed a rest. God knew he was getting to you.

JONAH Who are you anyway?

WELLY Oh, sorry. Wellington Whale, the Third, but you can call me Welly, 'cause you're sitting in my belly.

JONAH Is this for real?

WELLY Good question. Are you dreaming? Is this really happening? Will this be a repressed memory? Will you look back when you are lying on a doctor's couch and say, "I think I was in the belly of a whale?" And what will the psychiatrist say? "Maybe you're in a trance. You ever study TM? What's your mantra: 'Whale'?" (*Said like "ohm."*)

JONAH OK, I doubt it. Can I make a fire? It's pretty damp in here.

WELLY Yeah, go ahead. I've got a good chimney . . . you know, my spout. Good draft. I think there are a couple of Durafumes around. "Fire in the Belly." Sounds like a good title for a book . . . but anyway, you've got God problems. Who doesn't? Lots of people don't believe in God. Lots of people want God to solve all their problems . . . help them win the lottery. Sheesh! So what's *your* problem?

JONAH God's too easy, a really easy mark. He keeps changing his mind.

WELLY (*Singing.*) "First, you say you do and then you don't. And then you say you will and then you won't. You're undecided now, so what are you going to do?"

JONAH That's exactly it. God is so forgiving. God said he's really angry with those Ninevites.

WELLY You mean those folks who don't know their left hand from their right?

JONAH Yeah, I know what will happen. I'll tell them to repent and that's what they'll do; they'll put on sackcloth and ashes, ask for pardon, and God will love them again. Gag.

WELLY Jonah, Jonah, Jonah (*in the style of "Judy, Judy, Judy"*). Do you really believe that God stops loving anyone? Just because someone gets angry with you doesn't mean they don't love you. I guess people and God get angry when they're hurt or when they see you hurting yourself or others, but it doesn't mean they stop loving you. Jonah, you must have had some pretty bad mirroring experiences as an infant. You know, in your mother's or father's arms, maybe they weren't smiling. Life's hard, Jonah; you can't be happy all the time.

JONAH Well, Welly, I don't think it's fair and I've had it with God!

WELLY Fair, no. Merciful, yes. You may want to abandon God, but God will never abandon you. Jonah, I can see you need a lot of work. My diagnosis is "narcissistic disturbance" fluctuating between depression and grandiosity.

JONAH What does that mean?

WELLY It means you're not happy with who you are, Jo, but hey, who really is? That's what's neat about life . . . you can always change. That's why God asked *you* to go to Nineveh and say "repent." Maybe God wants *you* to have a change of heart, too. Find your true self and know that God loves you, the Ninevites, everybody.

JONAH I'll think about it.

WELLY Well, Jonah, you're three days and fifty minutes are up. Whale therapy is much bigger than plain old therapist therapy. I'm going to spew you out and want you to get back on your way to Nineveh.

NARRATOR
*Jonah emerges
from the whale and
swims toward shore.*

So Welly spewed, and Jonah swam and as he did could hear a voice singing:

WELLY

(Singing) "I want to be happy, but I won't be happy, 'til I make you happy too."

NARRATOR

*Jonah ad libs
preaching to the
congregation:*

"Repent."

"God is angry." etc.

*Then he sits
under the plant.*

Now you would think after three days in the belly of Welly that Jonah would have changed . . . but no, he was the same old grumpy Jonah, only now he was also smelly. He went to Nieveh, told them to repent; they did, and he got even madder at God. So he went and sat under a tree and sulked because God was gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And God loved Jonah, just as he was—grumpy, sulky, and stubborn—for God abounds in steadfast love. God's love for us is bigger than a whale, bigger than the ocean, bigger than the universe. So when you hear the story of Jonah, think of this:

MORAL ONE

Although there's something fishy about God's purpose, remember God put Jonah in the belly of the fish on porpoise.

MORAL TWO

Whether your luck comes up heads or tails, God's love is bigger than a hundred whales. So if the ship of your life won't sail, remember that God's mercy will never fail.

