



Texts in Context

When the Wheels Come Off: Homiletical Reflections on Jonah 2

STEPHEN W. RAMP

*Luther Seminary
St. Paul, Minnesota*

THIS IS A HOMILETICAL CASE STUDY BASED ON A SERMON PREPARED AND preached in July 1999. Part I identifies the contextual and textual issues that generated the sermon. Part II presents the sermon as preached with explanatory annotations. Part III offers some final thoughts. No one else could or should preach this sermon, of course. The purpose of a case study is to think together about the preaching process in order to enable all of us more fully to do our own work of preaching.

I. PREPARING TO PREACH

1. Contextual Issues

I embrace Fred Craddock's view that "preaching is by its nature an acoustical event having its home in orality not textuality." This means "the sermon as spoken word is socially owned, having its life at a particular time and place among a group of participants who are not only influenced by the nature and purpose of the occasion but who also bring to their hearing personal and social factors which are ingredient to the experience of the sermon."¹ Therefore, before attempting to get the biblical text in view, preachers should pay attention to the various contexts that shape and will be shaped by this sermon. A hermeneutical assessment of ourselves and our hearers will influence—consciously and unconsciously—the texts we select, what we hear, and how we interpret and speak the word of God. Thomas Long puts it well:

¹Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985) 31-32.

STEPHEN RAMP is associate professor of homiletics.

[T]he preacher is the one whom the congregation sends on their behalf, week after week, to the scripture....If the preacher is to be the one sent to listen for God's truth in the Bible, the preacher not only must be willing to listen to the Bible but also must know how to listen. If the preacher is to be sent on behalf of the congregation, the preacher must also know how to listen to *them*.²

In this case, listening is shaped by at least five contexts:

a. The hearers. This sermon was prepared for a large, affluent, predominantly white, metropolitan, flagship Presbyterian church in the midwest. It has a history of leadership in social justice and civic involvement. The worship style is formal and expectations for excellent preaching are high.

b. The pastoral ministry. The congregation has been a successful one and is now trying to recover its bearings. In 1997, the senior pastor and an associate pastor suddenly resigned. Eighteen months later, the pulpit was still vacant and the future unclear. The church was well served by an experienced interim pastor for a year. However, since Easter the preaching duties have been shared by associate pastors and guest preachers. The Pastoral Nominating Committee recently reported that it had interviewed over 150 candidates but was still looking for the elusive gift of outstanding preaching.³ The extended hiatus has not helped attendance or morale. It appears likely that the PNC will be nominating a candidate very soon.⁴ A hopeful word for difficult times is in order.

c. The preacher. A guest preacher in the summer rotation is the beneficiary of high hopes and low expectations. As a seminary professor, I will be presumed competent. A month earlier I preached here—on Jonah 1—and was warmly received. However, I have not earned the love and affection of this congregation and will need to work to establish rapport and trust. My knowledge of this congregation, while considerable, is largely superficial. Moreover, since I hail from the southern branch of this denomination, I speak as an outsider geographically and, to a lesser extent, theologically. The positive response to my first sermon inspired the preparation of this second sermon. My task is to be an intermediary. Throughout the preparation process, I pray that God's will for this congregation will be revealed and experienced through me.

d. The liturgy. Summer preaching occurs liturgically in ordinary time. Ordinary time allows preachers more easily to depart from the lectionary and preach a series on specific themes or subjects. Given my limited engagement (once a month

²Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989) 44.

³In the monthly newsletter published two months earlier, the Pastoral Nominating Committee reported, "The gift that has been most elusive is outstanding preaching. The PNC has scoured the country in search of pastors who have remarkable preaching gifts. We have searched for pastors who preach sermons that enlighten the mind, move the heart, help us strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and compel us in an outreach ministry of love, peace and justice to our sisters and brothers. We want to recommend someone who can preach in this fashion 30 or 40 times per year to our diverse congregation. This sort of preaching skill is very hard to find."

⁴The morning I preached this sermon the bulletin announced a congregational meeting one week hence for the purpose of hearing and calling a new senior pastor. This welcome news confirmed my decision not to dwell explicitly on the pulpit vacancy issue.

for three months) and the steady parade of new faces in the pulpit since Easter, I decided to preach through the book of Jonah. Jonah's profound theological depth and compact narrative structure seem ideally suited to this assignment.

In addition, the music director and the organist are highly trained and active collaborators in the design of the worship service. During the summer, the choir is robed, but the anthems are difficult pieces sung by accomplished soloists. The prelude and postlude are Mendelssohn's Sonata II. For hymns I chose: "What Wondrous Love Is This"—for reasons explained in the sermon; "Out of the Depths"—a difficult tune for many but a wonderful text based on Psalm 130; and "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less"—to send us forth on an exuberant note.

e. The secular situation. During the week before I preached, John Kennedy, Jr., his wife Carolyn, and her sister Lauren Bissette were lost and their bodies eventually found at sea. This loss sits heavily and frames our struggles with grief, loss, and death. As the week wore on, the story continued to unfold. The victims were buried at sea on Wednesday, memorialized on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and by Sunday the networks were chasing the next story. This tragic loss and the technology of grief helped me think about the contemporary relevance of Jonah's life and prayer.

2. Textual Issues

I will not recapitulate here what exegetical experts say about this text;⁵ instead, I will offer several textual insights that shaped my own thinking.

First, to understand Jonah's prayer from the fish's belly, it must be placed in context. Hearers need to know why Jonah is praying as if there is no tomorrow. Jonah's disobedience and descent are crucial in order to make sense of his prayer. To this end, before reading the text in worship, I summarized chapter one and began the reading at 1:15 (man overboard). This is a desperate prayer by a desperate man who wants to make contact with God. Reflecting on our own piety, I wondered whether we are as honest about our own situation. This led me to contrast our well managed, buttoned-down piety with Jonah's prayer from the underside of life.

Second, the prayer itself is a textual mess. It contains many references and allusions to the Psalms, but it is neither elegant nor seamless. Sometimes Jonah is telling us his story; at other times he is addressing God directly or warning a congregation (2:8). My inability to classify the prayer neatly led me to think more deeply about the disorienting nature of grief. When we are truly in the belly of hell, we don't offer insipid, well-polished prayers: we cry out in a rambling but very authentic way.

⁵Of the sources I consulted, these proved especially fruitful: James Limburg, *Jonah: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993); Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); Terence Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977); Thomas Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-examined* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1997); Geoffrey Bull, *The City and the Sign: An Interpretation of the Book of Jonah* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970); Joyce Baldwin, "Jonah," in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 543-590; Jack Sasson, *Jonah* (NY: Doubleday, 1990); Ze'ev Haim Lifshitz, *The Paradox of Human Existence: A Commentary on the Book of Jonah* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994).

Third, the prayer is Jonah's, but the main actor is God. God appoints the fish. God hears the prayer. God causes the fish to vomit Jonah out upon the dry land for a second chance. The good news here, finally, is that Jonah was as far away from God as one can humanly get, yet even there, God hears and acts in mercy. Wherever we are, we are not beyond God's providence and love. What's more, God's grace is independent of our disobedience and our piety. This portrait of God allows us to experience the gospel anew.

II. "WHEN THE WHEELS COME OFF": THE SERMON ANNOTATED

1. Introduction

"When the wheels come off." Best we can tell, this image comes from the world of sports.⁶ Take this press release from the Cornhusker Press Box News:

Looking back to last week's win over Texas Tech, Nebraska head coach Tom Osborne said the problem boiled down to one element: execution. "When your execution is poor, everything looks bad. The puzzling thing is...I thought we'd kinda got past our execution problems...then all of a sudden the wheels come off."

Osborne was referring to a very un-Husker like performance Saturday that saw the team commit 11 penalties,⁷ 7 fumbles and an interception in their 24-10 *victory* over Big 12 rival Texas Tech.⁷

With all due respect, I submit Coach Osborne committed linguistic malpractice! When you beat your opponent by 14 points, the wheels have *not* come off. A little wobbly, perhaps, by Cornhusker standards, but the wheels are still working.

The wheels did come off last Sunday at the British Open in Scotland. In case you missed it, the French golfer, Jean Van de Velde, cruised into the final hole with a huge three-shot lead. Had he shot par (4) or a bogey or even a double bogey (my specialty), he would have walked away as champion of the coveted British Open. Unfortunately, Van de Velde shot a triple bogey, and lost in a playoff. Davis Love, III, called it "the most disastrous thing I've ever seen in sports." One suspects that Davis Love and Coach Osborne were classmates at the University of Hyperbole. Van de Velde himself was more realistic. He said, "It's just a game. It's not life and death. It's your name on a trophy. At the end of the day, 200 years from now, who will even remember?" He's probably right: 200 years should be long enough to erase this terrible memory! His wife was more philosophical: "I am quite happy

⁶My strategy here is two-fold. First, I want to establish rapport and interest. Second, I want to introduce the subject (dealing with tragedy) and move the discussion from the surface into the depths. By starting out with some rather ridiculous examples, I'm being intentionally playful and palpably ironic. The hearers can enjoy these examples from sports, decide whether or not they can trust this preacher. The turn from sports to Martha's Vineyard draws us in. This approach introduces the subject and moves quickly towards deeper water.

⁷*Husker Press Box News* (October 22, 1996); found at www.net-link.net/~mfricke/focus.htm (emphasis mine).

with what he did. He went for it on every shot....Perhaps he went too far. *C'est la vie.*" Now there is wisdom and grace.⁸

It's one thing to have the wheels come off in sports. This past week, seven miles off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, we were painfully reminded once more just how fragile and fleeting...and cruel...life can be. How it can turn on a dime, when the wheels come off, and a wedding becomes instead a wake. As people of faith, what are we to do when the wheels come off? When life is turned upside down? When the weight of loss and grief is simply too much to bear?⁹

2. Jonah's Situation

That is precisely what is at stake in the second chapter of Jonah. Jonah's wheels have come off, and he finds himself swimming in the pit of hell (Sheol).¹⁰ He did not get there by accident. You'll recall that Jonah was attempting the impossible: to run away from God. God told him to go to Nineveh and preach a hard word, but Jonah vetoed that plan, voted with his feet, and headed in the opposite direction—away from the presence of the Lord. Instead of going east, he went west. Instead of going up to Nineveh, he went down.

The text says: He went down to Joppa (the seaport town). He went down to the ship (to the water's edge). He went down in the hold of the ship to sleep during the storm. And when he was thrown overboard, at his own insistence, he went down...like a stone...dead weight. In the book of Jonah, God is giving us a lesson in spiritual geography.¹¹ Left to our own devices, we will go down. It's the story of the church. It's the story of Israel. It's our story.

Sometimes it's our own fault. We are responsible for the mess we're in. But sometimes it's nobody's fault, it just is. One minute you're cruising down life's highway at 70 mph. It looks like it will be strawberry fields forever. Then, suddenly, without warning, the wheels come off. Life spins out of control. All the familiar landmarks are gone, and you find yourself floundering in loss, engulfed in grief, consumed by confusion and chaos. How are we to cope?

Not, I submit, through sound-bite theology. This week we've been bombarded with television coverage—some of it excellent—of search and rescue missions, search and recovery missions. We've heard from experts galore: from the Coast Guard, the Navy, aeronautics, pilots, and commentators. One thing struck me again and again. We've almost got tragedy down to a formula in this country—at least celebrity tragedy. We saw it with Princess Diana. And again this week.

⁸*Star Tribune: The Newspaper of the Twin Cities*, 20 July 1999, C7. The headline read: "Frenchman's Flop is Tale of Courage, Grace, Tears."

⁹This is the key of the sermon. This sentence sets up everything that follows. This is the situation which God will address. The pace slows down, the language is carefully chosen to carve deeply.

¹⁰This move gets the text back in front of us and sets up the idea of spiritual geography. I am using a narrative approach, trying to experience what the story is doing, as opposed to asking form-critical or dogmatic questions.

¹¹I like the phrase "spiritual geography" because it captures a new way of looking at the descent and spatial characteristics of Jonah. It also piques interest and allows the preacher to convey the idea in a contemporary setting. Cf. Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (New York: Tickner & Fields, 1993).

Over and over you heard: “Now that they’ve found the bodies, they can get on with their lives.” “Now that they’ve spread the ashes on the sea, they can get on with their lives.” “Now that the memorial service is over, they can get on with their lives.”

Baloney! How simple life would be if it were so. And simplistic. Sound-bite theology is a plastic lie designed to protect us from the reality of death and loss and grief. But we are not teflon people. We don’t need to be hustled through the stages of grief. Instead, we need to indwell the empty places, the deep places, the hard places, our defeats and failures as well as our victories.

Jonah understands this.¹² By chapter 2, he gets it. And he shows us how.

3. Going to School on Jonah’s Nickel

When the pain is our own, it’s difficult to learn from it. We’re too close. But when the pain is someone else’s, like Jonah’s, perhaps he can be our teacher.

Jonah’s prayer is nothing if not honest. This is a desperate prayer of a desperate man in desperate straits. No pretense. No flowery words. No fancy liturgy. No bulletin! No Bach, no Mozart, no Mendelsohn, no Handel. This is faith stripped to the bone. He is empty-handed before God.¹³ You’ll recall, when he was on the ship, the captain woke him up and asked him to call out to his god. “Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish” (Jon 1:6). But Jonah couldn’t or wouldn’t. He didn’t pray then. He does now!

I cried out to the Lord in my distress, and he heard me.
Out of the belly of hell I cried, and you heard my voice.
I was sinking...and you lifted me up.

Jonah was so low, the sea had closed in over him. The deep swallowed him. He was so low that sea weeds had wrapped around his head. He was so low, he could see the roots of the mountains. It’s a place so remote it seemed like a prison guarded by bars from which there is no escape. You can’t get any lower, any farther away from God. He was a goner, and he knew it. And yet...he prayed.

I ask you to contrast Jonah’s desperation, Jonah’s humility, Jonah’s brutal honesty with our own—How shall I put this?—our own well managed piety, our own very buttoned-down behavior.¹⁴

I teach at a Lutheran Seminary. I don’t fully understand Lutheran piety, but I do understand Presbyterians. We like being in control at all times. We hate feeling incompetent. We expect to make a difference. Nothing wrong with this—up to a point. But there is a dark side to it.

My own fear of incompetence, fear of failing, fear of standing empty-handed

¹²This transition turns us back to Jonah’s experience for theological insight. We are weaving back and forth between word and world.

¹³This phrase, being empty-handed before God, captures Jonah’s true condition and our own. I want to work with it and let it take root. The story of my CPE debacle builds on this.

¹⁴Having described Jonah’s lowly state, I now wish to contrast it with our own rather exalted way of trying to secure our own existence through self-help.

before God was brought home to me in seminary. (When I practiced law I was blissfully ignorant, but when you attend seminary, you find yourself empty-handed a lot). Most seminary training includes Clinical Pastoral Education or CPE. My CPE was at Robert Wood Johnson hospital in New Jersey. A great hospital, lots of very good doctors and nurses, lots of very sick people. The idea is for seminary students to sharpen their ministerial skills by practicing on live patients. It sounds reasonable. But imagine going into a patient's room empty-handed. No medical books. No stethoscope. No uniform. No nothing. Just you and God. Having come out of a profession where we dressed for success and were expected to take charge of tough situations, I was fairly skeptical about this amateurish arrangement.

My first victim, I mean patient, was a heart patient—an elderly Jewish man, whose name I have permanently blocked from my conscious mind. But I remember the scene perfectly. I knocked gingerly on his door, let myself in, saw him lying there attached to all kind of tubes and machines monitoring his every breath. Bip. Bip. Bip. He seemed to be resting quietly. That would soon change.

Not wanting to appear totally incompetent, I casually picked up his medical chart at the foot of his bed and pretended to read it. It said something about surgery. We were on the cardiac care floor, and he didn't look too well, so I figured, Hmmm, he's going to have heart surgery. Little did I know he had already had bypass heart surgery. Using my best impersonation of a chaplain, I sidled up to Mr. Heart Problem and said, "Hi, I'm Steve Ramp, the chaplain on your floor." We shook hands. It was a good start. Not able to leave well enough alone, I said, "How do you feel about your surgery tomorrow?" That's when the wheels came off!

Tomorrow? His eyes flew wide open. Terror seized him. He tried to get out of bed. He began thrashing around wildly. That's when the machines went off. Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep! I had angered the technology. Oh great, I've done it now. My first patient, and he's going to die. Then the loud speaker kicked in: "Just a minute! Hold on! We're coming!" Seconds later three nurses burst into the room loaded for bear. They worked heroically on the poor fellow for a long time and gave him an injection.

Being completely humiliated, embarrassed, and scared, I just wanted to escape. Run out. I tried several times, but the poor man kept waving his hand for me to sit down *now*. Plus, I figured I might be wanted later for questioning. After what seemed like forever, the danger passed. Science had prevailed. My patient was going to live! When we were finally alone, he turned his ashen face towards me and said, "Young man, you really gave me a start when you said I was facing surgery tomorrow. I just got out of intensive care. I had surgery last Thursday, and you're telling me I've got to go through it again?" I confessed all. "I'm new at this. You are my first patient, ever." He said, "You'll probably improve with practice."

It was the last time I ever pretended to read a medical chart. The point is, we don't like to admit that we are helpless, incompetent, desperate. We try so hard to

be in control, to keep it between the white lines, to be the captain of our ship. It's deeply ingrained, individually and culturally.

I think it's also true of us as a denomination. Presbyterians don't want to talk about sinking down. We want to fly like an eagle, not sink like a stone. Our opening hymn this morning is a case in point. "What wondrous love is this, O my soul" is not a proper processional hymn. I chose it because it contains a verse that would have been very appropriate for today's text. The problem is, our hymnal editors saw fit to delete part of the hymn. The second verse, which we did not sing, goes like this:

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,
Christ laid aside his crown for my soul.

I ask you: What does it say about us that the Episcopal and Lutheran churches sing this verse, but the Methodists and Presbyterians deleted it? There are probably lots of inferences we could draw. We don't like to think about God's righteous frown. But Jesus took care of this. I conclude that we don't like to dwell on sinking down.

But friends, whom are we kidding? It's this attitude, arrogance, this false pride, that prevents us from doing what we most need to do, especially when the wheels come off: cry out to God. If there's any good that comes from having the wheels come off, maybe it puts us in contact with who we really are, what really matters, who God is.

Jonah says, "I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me." Beloved, part of what it means to be in Christ is to be able to come clean, to admit our great need for deliverance, for comfort, for faith, for peace. When we aspire to a foolish professionalism (as I did and sometimes still do); when we keep a stiff upper lip and pretend things are peachy, when they aren't; when we try to get on with our lives instead of indwelling the reality of pain and loss we distance ourselves from God as surely as Jonah did by fleeing for Tarshish. It's a fool's errand. And Jonah knew it. Which is why he warns us: "Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty" (2:8). Jonah teaches us that the proper posture of prayer is our great poverty and desperate need. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:3). I hope when you pray, you won't offer insipid, innocuous prayers where nothing's really at stake, nothing really on the line. The next time you pray, put yourself in the belly of that stinking fish and cry out to God.¹⁵

Jonah's prayer is honest. It is also short and messy, plain and unvarnished—which is good news for most of us. Scholars delight in trying to track down all the references and allusions to the Psalms in Jonah's prayer. But Jonah

¹⁵I mentioned the "stinking" fish because during the children's sermon some of them were commenting on how dark and smelly it must have been "down there."

isn't leading public worship. He belts it out. Sometimes he addresses God directly, sometimes he seems to be lecturing a congregation. He rambles. He doubles back. It isn't carefully crafted. It just sort of blurts out praise, confession, thanksgiving, maybe a little bargaining: How shall I look again on your holy temple when I'm down here dying? Help me! A little history: this happened, then this happened, then this happened.

I point this out because when you read or hear this prayer, you may say it doesn't sound very organized. It's kind of confusing. Hard to classify. Bingo! When the wheels come off, grief is unspeakable and disorienting. One father who lost a son said that he "experienced the grief as a physical pain that lasted for many days. The pain was accompanied by intense disorientation. I felt unsafe, he said. I couldn't drive. I felt like it was dangerous walking across the street because you lost that much focus."¹⁶

When the wheels come off, let us pray like Jonah: let it roll out, not self-consciously, but as deep calling out to deep, as a child calling for her parent.

Jonah teaches us to pray honestly and inelegantly, spontaneously, from the heart. But perhaps the most heartening thing for us is the portrait of God that undergirds this prayer. In the midst of the worst nightmare imaginable—the loss of a leg, loss of your sight, loss of your mind (your memory), the loss of your life's savings, the loss of a pastor, the loss of a friendship, the loss of a marriage, the loss of a child—when you have traveled as far away from the sunshine of God's love as you thought humanly possible, even in Sheol, in the belly of hell, God is there!

You can almost hear the amazement in Jonah's prayer: I was under water. I was out of sight. I was scraping bottom. My life was ebbing away. I cried out from the belly of Sheol, Hades, the dead place, the netherworld. But even there, his prayer reached God, and God was moved to bring up his life from the pit. St. Paul puts it dogmatically: Nothing in life or death, *nothing* can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus puts it to us personally: "I will not leave you orphaned" (John 14:18). "Lo, I am with you always" (Matt 28:20).

The good news is this: in the final analysis, our fate, our future, doesn't depend on our professionalism or our piety or our prayers, our efforts to do good or to be good. It depends only and always, only and always, on the faithfulness of God. Whether we know it or not, whether we fully accept it or not, we belong to God in life and in death, in sickness and in health, for better and for worse, and forever. And nothing we do—or fail to do—can change that. Whether we are sailing along, sinking down, or scraping bottom, we are never beyond the reach and care of our Heavenly Father.

Friends, we are not promised a free ride or an easy life. There are times when the wheels come off, and we are reduced to weakness, poverty, much pain, and

¹⁶Bob Herbert, "With loss of a child, everything is changed forever," *Star Tribune*, 23 July 1999, A23 (quoting Dr. Irwin Redlener, president of the Children's Hospital at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx, whose son, Jason, died in a snowboarding accident).

many tears. When the wheels do come off, where will you *turn*? Where will *you* turn?

Let us turn with our brother, Jonah, and offer our sacrifice of praise...in good times and in distress. For deliverance belongs to the Lord—whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

“Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.” AMEN

III. FINAL REFLECTIONS

This article confirms Fred Craddock’s claim that “[t]he actual preaching of a sermon is a non-repeatable, non-portable event. If a sermon happens to enjoy an afterlife in print, its readers’ experience is far different from its hearers’ experience.”¹⁷ Still, reflecting on an actual sermon and the contexts that generated it and into which it spoke is not in vain. The doubt and uncertainty of the congregation were taken into the world of the text. The text illumined the world and the world illumined the text. The congregation’s professionalism and society’s penchant for quick fixes (celebrity tragedy in a weekly format), mastery (my CPE debacle), and our refusal to look failure in the eye (omitting a crucial verse from the opening hymn), were exposed, challenged, and reframed.

Instead of evoking our pity, Jonah’s misfortune and desperation become normative in times of grief and loss. We can identify with and learn from Jonah.¹⁸ We are disobedient, needy, neglectful, willful, desperate, and empty-handed before God, yet it is enough. God’s healing word through Jonah can free us from our demons and free us to cry out in thanksgiving for the grace of God in Jesus Christ that reaches us in all circumstances. ⊕

¹⁷Craddock, *Preaching*, 32.

¹⁸After the service a number of people told me of their personal losses and how they identify with Jonah’s struggle, but also with his hope.