

THE GREAT FISH

by Pastor Dave Gens

Whenever you start to tell fishing stories, it's hard to know where truth and fabrication begin and end. So, this story is mostly true, but some of the details are suspect.

Reverend Ralph Imes, a long time beloved pastor in this area, was on a trip to Israel in the early 1950's. While he was visiting Joppa in Israel, he was fascinated with Jonah and the Big Fish story. It so caught his fancy that he decided to make an 800 mile trip to the east of Israel to the city of Nineveh to verify the story.

What caught his attention was that people were saying that there still were present day relatives of the fish that swallowed Jonah back in Bible times. Now we know that Jonah got on the boat in Joppa but instead of going east, went west in the Mediterranean Sea. To test the story out, Reverend Imes got on a boat, sailed west from Joppa, went through the Suez Canal, around the Persian Gulf to the Tigris River and ended up 240 miles north of Baghdad at present day Mosul, Iraq which is right across from Nineveh. There he purchased a baby fish. The fish was a many generational descendant of Sir William, the Great Fish.

He came back to Birchdale, preached a sermon at the church and headed to Baudette on a Sunday morning to preach another sermon there. While he was crossing the Baudette Bay, the baby fish, which was already growing bigger minute by minute, leaped out of the fish bowl into the Baudette Bay!

Now the next sign of the relative of Sir William, the Great Fish, was verified by Bruce Sundvall. Bruce, retired Air Force, says that reflections off of the radar were showing evidence of a great big fish in the Rainy River.

Bruce sent out word to his friends and one of his friends brought sonar to the area in 1959 and it showed a huge fish. Using the sonar, they tracked down and were able to net a gigantic fish which they mounted and is on display to this day at the intersection of Highway 11 and 172.

The question that we always talk about is how can this Great Fish be a walleye? Arlen Block, while stationed in Iraq and working out of Mosul says that the locals talk about a Great Fish that had been blessed by God. The blessing showed up as a white spot on the fish's fin. So that there could be no confusion between Sir William, the Great Fish in Nineveh, and the fish caught in the Rainy River, the decision was made to shorten the name of the fish to "Willie". That's why 50 years later we have a long lost descendant of Jonah's Great Fish right here on display in Baudette! When you see the white spot on the tail of any walleye, you can remember that God is blessing walleyes here in Lake of the Woods, Baudette.