

## **Jonah 3:1-5, 10** - “The Divine and Saving Nature of God’s Incarnate Word”

Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan - Epiphany 3B/Sanctity of Life Sunday 2024

This Third Sunday of Epiphany has also become known as Life Sunday, during which we consider the sanctity of all human life and the evils of things like abortion and assisted suicide in our society. Therefore, our OT reading from Jonah is certainly appropriate. Not only does it remind us of the selfish nature of sin even among God’s people, like Jonah, which is at the heart of most of the corruption in our society, but it also reminds us of how God gets personally and physically involved in saving us from our sinful, selfish ways through His incarnate and almighty Word.

Our text begins with these words: “*Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.’*” The first time God sent Jonah to Nineveh, Jonah refused to go. Instead, he got on a boat headed to Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction of Nineveh.

If we put ourselves in Jonah’s place, we may better understand his initial refusal to proclaim God’s word to the Ninevites. Nineveh was at the time the capital of the Assyrian Empire, which had in the past captured and killed many of God’s people and continued to be a threat to them. Therefore sending Jonah to proclaim God’s word to Nineveh would be like sending you to the middle part of Nigeria today, where radical Islamic terrorists continue to butcher and hack to death Christians. Around 200 were massacred over this past Christmas.

How hard is it for you to share the truth of God’s Word to family members who oppose it, let alone terrorists. Truth is, we’re all sinners who are turned in on ourselves—who, like Jonah, are more concerned about ourselves than others, and their eternal life. Man’s selfish nature certainly found an outlet in the sexual revolution of the 60’s, which has deteriorated further into countless abortions, assisted suicides, and a rapidly growing list of sexual perversions in the LGBTQ movement. Such behavior results from our sinful nature’s concern for itself, no matter what the cost is to others.

God made it clear in the beginning that the man and woman, instead of being bent in on themselves, were to give themselves to each other in the marriage bond not only for the benefit and joy of their spouse, but also for the procreation of children, when it’s God’s will, and then in the giving of themselves to their children. This is reminiscent of our Lord giving Himself to us in Jesus Christ, resulting in our eternal joy and life. And when we share God’s gift of eternal joy and life through Jesus Christ with others, God works through us to create new and eternal joy and life in them. What a blessed plan this is for all God’s children.

But when man disconnected himself from God’s Word and His purpose for our lives, man’s new truth (apart from God’s Word) becomes whatever he thinks or feels will make him happy. Making sacrifices in our lives for the sake of others, while it’s the main focus of our lives as God’s people who believe that the Son of God sacrificed His life to save us, we, like Jonah, continue to struggle with our selfish, sinful nature which puts our happiness before the happiness of others.

How did God turn Jonah around from his selfish, sinful ways? He reminded him of what he deserved because of his sins by allowing him to experience shades of the darkness of death for three days, after being swallowed up by a great fish. That great fish points to Jesus, who swallowed up Jonah’s sins and ours through

His damning death on cross. Then on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead in victory over our sins and death. What happened to Jonah after three days? *“The LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land”* (Jonah 2:10). Not quite as glorious as Jesus’ resurrection, but still a message of salvation.

If you think that’s amazing, think about the amazing way God saved the people of Nineveh through the shortest sermon ever. The message God gave Jonah to preach was, *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown.”* Amen. These words may not appear to include God’s message of love and mercy, but apparently the fact that God cared enough to send someone to give them this warning, and to give them forty days to think about it, was enough to result not in the Ninevites being *“overthrown,”* but in their sinful nature being *“overthrown.”* They repented of their sins and put their trust in God’s mercy (Matthew 12:41).

Throughout the book of Jonah (and all Scripture) we are reminded of God’s loving patience with sinners, from the evil Ninevites, to the selfish prophet, Jonah. Consider also that after God saves us, like He did Jonah, He *“vomits”* us back onto dry land—into this corrupt world to save others.

So, when it comes to the topic of abortion, as with any other sin, our proclamation of God’s Word, especially the Law and the Gospel of the cross, is what God uses to save sinners like us. From babies born in sin, to those who have had or performed an abortion. From those who have assisted others in suicide, to those who have had in irreversible sex change. From our selfishness in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, to our selfish refusal to share the message of salvation through Jesus Christ with others outside the church. Through the message of God’s willingness to sacrifice Himself in Christ for our salvation, God is at work turning us all from our selfish ways to our selfless Savior, Jesus Christ, and then to the needs of others. As Martin Luther wrote in his Mighty Fortress hymn, *“One little word can fell him”* (referring to Satan and all evil). That Word is Jesus.

It’s not the quantity of words you use to tell others about Jesus, it’s the quality of God’s Word and His almighty presence with it that makes all the difference. Jonah said, *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown.”* Some of us stood on Main St. in Delta yesterday, holding up signs which said things like, *“Adoption is the Loving Option,”* and *“From the Moment of Conception Children are God’s Masterpiece.”* God works through His Word of Truth in miraculous ways to turn us from our selfish, sinful cravings which seek to destroy us, and to His selfless Son, who seeks always to save us.

All glory be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[Children’s Sermon] Who do we have to thank for this stringy cheese? [Distribute cheese sticks] (Farmers, cows, manufacturers, truck drivers...and ultimately God). But, what’s the best thing God gives us? Jesus, and all that He did on the cross to save us. He died to pay for our sins. He rose from the dead to give us His victory over our sins, death and the devil. And He comes to us today through His Word and Baptism to connect us to Jesus and keep us connected to Him forever through His Word and the Lord’s Supper. [pull string out of Bible and give to a child].

Once you have been connected to Jesus, if you had to decide between Jesus or your stringy cheese, which would you want to hang on to? Jesus. He saves you forever, this stringy cheese will only save you for a short time. [Exchange cheese stick for string].

The other good thing about being connected to Jesus is that when you tell others that Jesus is our Savior, you connect them to Jesus. [Exchange cheese stick for string with each child]. Now you’re all connected to Jesus, so if you die today, He will take you to heaven.

But what if Jesus doesn’t take you to heaven today? Do you think He will still take care of you in this life? Sure He will. [Return to the children their cheese stick].