

**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz**  
**January 25, 2009 Epiphany 3 Jonah 4:5-11**



Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die." But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

Dear children of our Heavenly Father – precious in His sight for Jesus' sake:

What do pastors do all day? When I was little I really thought they spent the whole week getting ready for Sunday mornings – for Wednesday nights during Advent and Lent. I knew they did funerals and weddings and Voters' Meetings which I knew could be pretty intense. And I knew they visited people who were in the hospital. But that was pretty much it. I didn't know about shut-ins. We do that all the time, too! I was visiting a shut-in in Waukesha the other day. Just inside the front door they had a bird cage – your classic round on the top – drawer of newspaper on the bottom – little door in the front – containers of bird seed and water and that sharpen your beak bone thing. It was a really big classic bird cage – with two very big – very beautiful turtle doves inside. They were making that indescribably dove noise. And I thought for a moment – stop and smell the roses – stop and appreciate these beautiful birds. And then I noticed on the very big – very soft chair – right next to the bird cage – sat a very fat cat. A very fat cat – with a very white tummy and slate grey fur on his back and on his face. He had very big white paws and a very nervous tail that was going back and forth – back and forth. And he had very green eyes – that paid absolutely no attention to me. His very green eyes were very much focused on two very big turtle doves – very close. With only these little thin copper wires in the way! The birds remained oblivious to the danger – right there. There are in this world – literally billions of people who have no clue – to the spiritual danger that is right there beside them. They go about their lives – day after day – incredibly ordinary and painfully average – not realizing that the lion from hell would like nothing more than to have them for lunch. Only the Lord Jesus can forgive our countless sins and failures and he has. It is this powerful Gospel that changes everything. Today God's Word would ask a simple question:

**Should the LORD Not Be Concerned?**

- 1. What are we concerned about?**
- 2. What does God take care of?**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on today – is from the story of the reluctant missionary Jonah. Just about everybody knows something about the story of Jonah and the *whale*. Even people who know very little about God's Word have heard of this little man who was swallowed by a whale! It is important for us to remember the most important part is not the whale – or technically the *great fish*. The most important part isn't Jonah either. The most

important part is the LORD – the Great I AM – the Holy One of Israel. The most important part is the LORD – and the Word of the LORD – the message of law and gospel – the message of grace for Jonah – and for all the people in the great city of Nineveh!

Unless you have been living under a rock – if you read the papers or watch the news – we are living in difficult times. This is nothing new. More than 850 years before baby Jesus was born there was trouble in Israel. Some of the worst rulers in all of history – people like wicked murderous King Ahab and his Godless wife Jezebel were a scourge on the backs of God’s people. The country itself was quite literally shrinking – enemies nibbling away at the edges – more and more. God’s Word says, **“Everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering.”** 2 Kings 14:26 Not that they were whining and complaining and feeling sorry for themselves – but everyone was suffering. Still the LORD was faithful. The LORD sent his spokesman Jonah to King Jereboam II with the promise that better times were ahead. Jereboam was king for 40 years and became one of Israel’s most powerful. Yet – as often happens – the more people prospered materially and financially – the more *things and stuff* people had – the less they thought about their Heavenly Father. God’s Word says the more prosperity and military power the king enjoyed the more **“He did evil in the eyes of the LORD!” And so did God’s people. They forsook all the commands of the LORD their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.”** 2 Kings 17:16,17 Did you catch that phrase – the people **sold themselves**? This is prostitution in the most crass and crude terms – to sell yourself! People do that still today. They prostitute themselves – sell *themselves* – their time, their thoughts, their health, their marriages, their everything – to get more money! Back in Bible times they called it fertility cult worship. It’s kind of a rural flavored materialism. The more hugs and kisses – the more animal lust – the more people abused and used and even molested one another – the more the fertility gods were pleased – the more your flocks and herds grew – the more your fields grew crops – the richer you became! There seemed to be no end to the people’s appetite for what was filthy and wrong. This was *spiritual adultery* at its worse. The more Israel prospered physically and financially – the poorer her people became spiritually. Spiritually they were homeless – beggars and thieves – their spiritual treasures in garbage bags and grocery carts. It was horrible.

At this time – Israel’s worst enemy politically and militarily – was Assyria – the people today in Iran and Iraq! It was to these cruel, violent and blood-thirsty people that the LORD of grace and mercy sent his reluctant prophet Jonah. Sometimes – when you are little – you think Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh – to preach God’s Word – because he was afraid – afraid – that these really mean people would do him hurt and harm. The real reason Jonah didn’t want to preach to the people of Nineveh was because he was afraid it would work. He was afraid if he preached law and gospel the people would repent and the LORD would relent and they would be spared and saved! Jonah didn’t want the people to be saved! He wanted them to be crushed – to be destroyed – to be wiped off the face of the earth! Jonah didn’t want people like that to be saved! Jonah preached the law. The people repented. The LORD relented. The LORD showed mercy! Still – Jonah’s heart had not changed.

**Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.** Jonah still held out hope that the LORD would rain down fire and brimstone on the great and terrible city of Nineveh – the way he

destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah long before. Jonah still held out hope that maybe the LORD would open up the ground and swallow up these vile and distasteful people like that time with **Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them.** Deuteronomy 11: 6 Remember that – and the fact that the LORD changes not – and it makes you think – and so? **Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city... and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine.** Jonah sat back – in the shade of the vine – perhaps a castor bean plant – with nice big leaves – to give him cool shade. Jonah appreciated that shade.

**But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die."** Jonah was a spunky child – spunky enough to talk back to his Heavenly Father. The LORD had set up the proverbial teachable moment.

**The LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"** What do we worry about? What makes us concerned? Those deer up by Waupaca – that those snow mobilers hurt? Didn't that bother you? That lady in New York State that was out at midnight – calling – ok yelling the name of her lost dog – frantic to find her puppy – and what? They are going to give her a ticket for *disturbing the peace*? I can't watch that commercial where they show the puppies that need to be rescued – I can't – I just can't! And little people – little people so young – they can't tell their right hand from their left. I see them at Children's Hospital in Milwaukee. If you ever – ever start to feel sorry for yourself – spend just a few minutes in the oncology department at Children's Hospital. Watch one little child – all their hair gone from the chemo – walking down the hall with their IV pole on wheels – a little person with a brain tumor or bone cancer – see them smile – and you will be ashamed of your self-pity! If we have pity for puppies and bunnies and white tailed deer – and pity for the physical hurt of little people – then surely we must be concerned about the spiritual – eternal welfare of people everywhere. When you realize that there are people in danger of eternal destruction – you will tell them about law and gospel! If we have people we know and love who are in danger – people who are unshepherded – who don't have a shepherd – a pastor – tell us and we will visit them. I was happy – to go to from Watertown to Rockford Memorial Hospital – I know right where that is because I used to be pastor at Peace, Loves Park, North Rockford – for just 2 minutes to tell a little grandpa on his death bed – that Jesus loved him. That's all I got to do – before someone said – "Get out! Can't you see he's dying?" Yes, I could see he was dying – and that made it so important to tell him the essential Gospel truth – Jesus died on the cross for you – to take all your sins away. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved! And the door was slammed! And that was it. I would drive that far again – in a moment – for just that one last chance to tell someone – anyone – that Jesus died for them, too! We need to tell the people we love that Jesus died for them, too!

**"Should I not be concerned about that great city?"** Are we concerned about people in San Francisco – or do we think to our self – those people are very odd. Have you ever been to San Francisco – down by *Fisherman's Warf* – where they have this guy – bush man? It's this guy that

holds these branches – and leaps up at people! That’s all he does – jump out of the bushes. And people give him money? Are we concerned about the people of Paris? The French? I hear – if you *Google* French military victories – it comes up blank? The French – I heard they are all very snooty – with their wine and their snails – and their fancy designer clothes! Or people in Moscow? That Putin guy – he would like to run his tanks through our streets! That’s not to mention Tehran. Remember when they took all our Embassy people hostage for 444 days? I do! And Hanoi – the *Hanoi Hilton*. Remember that? I do! What about places like Tarapoto – smelly from the Amazon River – smelly in the market with tables full of chunks of beef and chicken and fish – with people with sticks with horse hairs on them to *sort of* shoo the flies away. And out in the street – slabs of hard wood for making caskets – small ones – for little children who die from malaria and dysentery and mal-nutrition! Do we care about them? Yes, we do. Because Jesus cares about them. And Jesus uses us – you and me – to share the Gospel with them before it’s too late. The LORD cares about all these cities – great ones and small ones – because they are full of people that Jesus died and rose again to save. Should God be concerned? If he wasn’t we’d all be lost. Shouldn’t we be concerned, too? Amen!

**To God alone all glory!**

*Rev. Anthony L. Schultz*



## Epiphany 3 Series B



### **FIRST LESSON: Jonah 3:1-5,10**

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city – a visit required three days. On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

### **Psalm 62, page 88**

### **SECOND LESSON: 1 Corinthians 7:29-31**

What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

**VERSE:** The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of islands be glad. Hallelujah!

### **GOSPEL: Mark 1:14-20 The Calling of the First Disciples**

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.