

### Sermon Outline

#### GOD’S LOVE COMES BIG ENOUGH TO MAKE EVERY LIFE MATTER.

1. The Ninevites matter to Jonah, but only as human shields.
2. You matter to the sinful world, but only as an instrument for their benefit.
3. God’s love comes big enough to make both Jonah and Nineveh matter.
4. Jesus makes your life matter as much as any other endangered life.

### Sermon

#### 1.

Jonah wants an abortion. Jonah wants God to get an abortion. Of course he wouldn’t ever have one himself, but he supports the option remaining available for Nineveh, even if it means absconding across state lines to Tarshish. Jonah, in an open-minded attitude of tolerance and equality, advocates severing these Assyrians’ umbilical life support. One way or another, by neatly neglecting or untidy action, Jonah wants to see the Ninevites euthanized.

You see, their continued existence makes him uncomfortable. They embody his mistake. They remind him of his limits. They represent an unintended interruption and inconvenience to him. Is he supposed to suspend his priorities and single-parent them? Did he ask to get blindsided by their exceptional needs and saddled with the

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Jonah 3:1-5, 10 “Love’s Fairer than War”

Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life

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responsibility to care for them? Of course, this doesn’t mean he has no use for them. In fact, Jonah does find the Ninevites quite important. They matter.

Their punishment matters, anyway—to pad his pride and improve his ego. Their suffering matters, to demonstrate his superiority. Their mistakes and misfortunes matter, as pawns to advance his agenda. They matter as playthings to use for his amusement. They matter as tokens and trophies to justify his own self-indulgences. They matter as animals and machines to excuse his own excesses. They matter as human shields to deflect any ethical accountability. They matter, just not as persons or as peers. They matter, but not as hearts or lives. They matter, almost as much as he matters, and not for their own sake but for his. Afford them the dignity due such devices, then euthanize and abort them whenever you’re done.

2.

You matter too. You are matter. (Unless you multiply by the speed of light squared—then you are energy.) To supporters of elective abortion access, you matter. To advocates of opting for assisted suicide, you matter. To embryo experimenters and fetal-tissue pharmaceuticals, you matter. To power-brokering lawmakers, you matter. You matter to the marketers of consumer culture. You matter to a society of sexual license. You matter to idolizers of attractiveness and productivity. You matter to crusaders for progress and evolution’s revolutionaries. To agents of the death industry, you matter. To

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hands that hunger to hold authority over life and death, you matter. To sinful souls that long to play god, you matter.

Your ambitions matter—to be exploited for their benefit. Your insecurities matter—to be expended for their pleasure. Your crises matter—to be leveraged for their profit. Your weaknesses matter—to validate their flesh’s drives and desires. Your questions and regrets matter—to disguise their selfish rebelliousness. Your sexuality matters to maximize their convenience, comfort, luxury, and lust. Your unborn and elderly make great sacrifices to the god of choices. Even if you don’t surrender them, you yourself will serve as a suitable human shield.

Why raise you from sin’s clutches when I could wrap myself inside its grip with you? Or better yet, wait until it’s tired of you, then take your cozy place completely? Your suffering warrants my freedom. Your consequences facilitate my promiscuity. Because you sin, I should get to also. Should something come for me, should somebody be coming for us, let them chew you up till they choke and I skate, no strings attached. And if I can scare the Law back from you, if I can bluff your way off the hook, I’ll end up scot-free too, and get credit besides. I stand on the side of history. I am a hero. The same salvation I design to dismiss your sins dismisses mine. Just sit there like a good hostage and let me negotiate for the both of us. Everyone wins when you let me use you. Never mind that it looks a lot like hell. It only costs our pesky humanity.

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3.

Rather than punish, God pursues and persuades. Instead of condemning, He courts and convinces.

#### GOD’S LOVE COMES BIG ENOUGH TO MAKE EVERY LIFE MATTER.

His love comes big enough to make Jonah and Nineveh matter—man, animal, and plant—from the greatest to the least. Where the Ninevites settle for sex scenes, God writes them into a love story. When Jonah angles for a breakup, this God orchestrates yet another grand romantic gesture. They’re heading to divorce, but He’s already arranging a real whale of a next date. They would slink into a one-night stand, but He’ll have none of it and serves up “happily ever after.” Both Jonah and those Ninevites would accept spiritual prostitution, but Almighty Maker of them all can’t stand any less than proposing marriage, and family as well.

He doesn’t just want to insist on their obedience. He wants to win their love. He doesn’t desire to exact their worship as much as He seeks to earn their trust. He craves their heart even more than their repentance. He prizes their eternity beside Him above their apology before Him. He doesn’t just long for their productive adulthood. He aches also after their arriving, however beautifully unborn; their abiding, however delightfully impaired; and their exiting too, however captivatingly aged and unable. And He doesn’t embrace the victims and “vulnerables” only but even the criminals.

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In four short chapters and three brief days, God moves the heavens and the earth for them. His Word secures both their survival and their salvation. He swallows His own vengeance to eat the cost and avert the destruction of the people’s own making. Faced with “Sophie’s choice,” to keep either Jonah or Nineveh at the other’s expense, God sacrifices Himself, His majesty and justice instead. Everyone suffers loss, but only the loss of self, and gains the other two for the price of that One. Even Lord God ends up looking the fool right along with them, but all ride off into the sunset together.

4.

Your life matters as much as any other endangered life. Your entire being matters to God, so much that He both leads with His full-force Law and does not leave off with it. He always follows—and follows you—with pure, clear, sweet, fierce Gospel. God doesn’t distantly snap His fingers, absent-mindedly sprinkle magic dust, casually say the secret word, wave His hand with a shrug, and make problems and obstacles instantly disappear. He sends Jesus. He enters and involves Himself, all in. He sets His mind, heart, body, and will next to and in front of yours, because all of you matters. Son of God and Mary’s manger, innocent but substitute, convicted then vindicated, violent cross and vacant grave show how much you—yes, you—do matter.

Time and servanthood He inhabits, for blind and deaf and leprous and lame ones, because your life matters, body and soul. In suffering and humility He reaches, the infant and elderly and unplanned and accidental ones, because your life matters right now and

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ever after. With body and blood He touches, the pauper and harlot and Pharisee and foreigner, because your life matters here on earth and in the kingdom to come. Entire life even unto death He gives, to unwanted and unworthy and selfish and sinful ones, because your life matters for resurrection and immortality. From heaven above He approaches and from grave beneath He encompasses, for better and worse and richer and poorer and sickness and health, to have and hold and love and cherish, from this day forward and even forevermore, and not even death do us part—because your life matters. Jesus ascended but present, Christ enthroned but intervening, Savior imminent but already, your life matters—you personally and others just like you.

Their lives matter because your life matters. Our lives matter because His life matters. The same Words and ways that save you save them. The same promises and commandments that claim your life claim theirs. The same Baptism and Communion grace us each. The same grace from God and faith in Jesus make us all. He consecrates their voice and vocation the way He does yours. Forgiven and redeemed change the world like it changes the Church. This Father, Son, and Spirit God of ours knows nothing other than love, making lives matter out of what once did not. He can, He does, and He will—no further death necessary—until war finally fades and love prevails in rendering everything fairer. Amen.