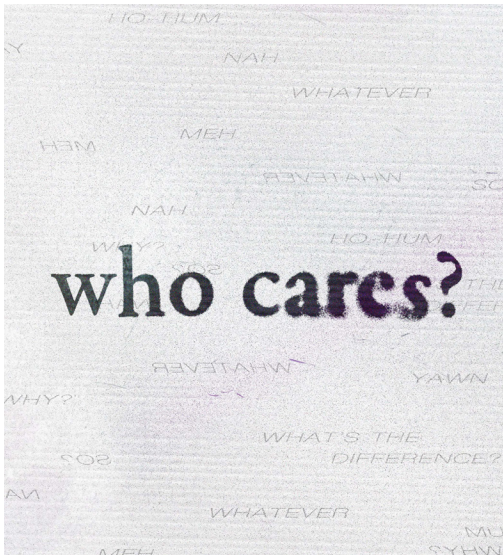




Sermon Growth Guide

October 6, 2024
Who Cares?



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Who Cares? - "Ho-Hum" - Jonah 4:1-11

Key Verse: "But the Lord said, 'You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?'" (Jonah 4:10-11)

Big Idea: To overcome apathy, we must realign our hearts with God's perspective, focusing on His mercy, love, and compassion, and moving beyond indifference.

Foundations

Jonah struggles to understand compassion. Despite God's mercy toward the repentant Ninevites, he resents their forgiveness and cannot align his heart with it, leading to apathy. This apathy stems from his biases and reluctance to step outside his comfort zone. Jonah's story reflects our own sin, especially how we view those different from us. Indifference and resentment mark his journey, but ultimately, the Lord has the final word of mercy.

Uche Anizor notes that apathy often arises from being overwhelmed by both important and trivial information, leading to compassion fatigue. We focus on insignificant details and develop a "ho-hum" attitude toward others.

Jonah's concern for trivial matters, like the plant, contrasts sharply with the weighty issue of Nineveh's salvation, revealing his discomfort with change.

Understanding God's Word

Read together Jonah 4:10-11. Here, God points out what is truly important: not a plant and certainly not Jonah's discomfort. Where are you pushed out of your comfort zone? In remembering the entire story of Jonah, what would you say are the things that have made Jonah's heart drift so far from God's heart of mercy, love and compassion? How does this resonate with your own lives?

Applying God's Word

This passage challenges us to examine how our trust in God can wane amid overwhelming needs and disasters, making our charitable efforts feel insignificant. We may feel overwhelmed and ask, "How can we help?" Our lack of trust is often linked to compassion fatigue. When have you felt this fatigue? How can aligning our hearts with God's mercy help us overcome it and trust in His sovereign plans?

Witnessing God's Word

"All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17) In a "ho-hum" world, followers of Jesus trust in the One who sustains all. We celebrate this during World Communion Sunday. By seeking God's mercy and compassion, we allow Christ to guide us beyond division and pain. Only Jesus can heal hearts..

“And now, this...” Our attention span is getting shorter and shorter. Wouldn't you say? Eyes up here. For a while now, we have been trained in what Neil Postman called a “peek-a-boo” infotainment game. Look here. Look there. Watch out! Watch this. We are like babies in a stroller with people running by saying, “peek-a-boo!” Postman wrote that in 1985, in a book called *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In 2005, comedian Ellen Degeneres said watching the news was this way. It seems schizophrenic: “There were no survivors...And next, which candy bar helps you lose weight... Still to come, there's an asteroid heading toward earth...But first, where to find the cheesiest pizza in town!” Neil Postman wrote in 1985. His concern was network television. Degeneres' was before the iPhone, before Facebook, before Instagram. Do you think any of this is having an effect on our mood? You bet it is!

We are studying apathy in this series, *Who Cares?* Where does this non-caring, demotivating malaise come from? How can we overcome it? God doesn't want us to live apathetic, grey, colorless lives. We should not give in to a Ho-Hum life of indifference. Uche Anizor, in *Overcoming Apathy*, says one of the causes of apathy is triviality. We are swimming in a sea of trivial information, all clawing for our attention. It is hard to care about any of it after a while, even the things we really should care about. It is hard to find the needle of what really matters in the haystack of trivialities. And now this... We fall prey to “compassion fatigue.” Do you ever find yourself struggling to care? Our hearts have gone out to North Carolina and the southeast this week. The suffering is enormous. When it is close to us, we can relate. That helps wake us up to care. But how many worse floods have happened around the world? War, natural disaster, terror, and, if you're honest with yourself, you can't really drum up enough energy to be bothered. Why?

Jonah is our guy today. We studied Jonah this spring. God told him to get up and go East, by land, to a large city of enemies to tell them about God. Jonah immediately got up and went West, by sea, to a small town in the middle of nowhere with hopes of saying nothing at all. What happened? God sent a storm, God sent a whale, God sent a second chance, and Jonah went to Nineveh. But he still didn't like it. He despised the Ninevites. He didn't want God's grace to come to the Ninevites. He wanted God's wrath to rain down on them. It didn't. “But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.” (Jonah 4:1) In fact, it made his heart sick. “Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:3)

Jonah camped outside the city, waiting for fire and brimstone to rain down. But it never did. “Jonah had gone 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 leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.” (Jonah 4:5-6) God gave Jonah a gift of comfort. It can get over 120 degrees in this area. Shade is helpful. “But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.” (Jonah 4:7) That may seem mean, but God is doing a good thing to Jonah. Jonah was trusting in that little plant for comfort, he was trusting in comfort. And, you may have to go back to the sermon series to get this, Jonah was trusting in his own view of what needed to happen for his nation, Israel, to have success against its enemies. He had his plan. Jonah did. God blasted that plan, just like God blasted the little shade tree. “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.’” (Jonah 4:8) You can feel a pretty thick ‘who

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cares' coming out of Jonah here. But God cares; and God wants Jonah to care too. "But the Lord said, 'You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?'" (Jonah 4:10-11) Don't forget the animals. God cares about animals too.

A hundred and twenty thousand lost people. A city full. And animals. Jonah is ho-hum. He doesn't care. Jonah has a lot of good reasons not to care what happens to the Ninevites. They were, truly, horrible enemies, military opponents and terrorists. But God cares for them too. How did Jonah get to "ho-hum, who cares"? The little plant is a clue. You care more about your own comfort than the suffering of a foreign city. Jonah's politics is a clue. You care more about the prosperity of your own nation than the suffering of a foreign city. We can learn both of those lessons ourselves. But I'm also thinking it was a failure of imagination in Jonah. He couldn't see how big God's plans are. He couldn't imagine a future where a saved Nineveh could be a good thing. He did not believe that God's plans are better. Tim Keller wrote about what we can learn from Jonah, "If you want to understand your own behavior, you must understand that all sin against God is grounded in a refusal to believe that God is more dedicated to our good, and more aware of what that is, than we are. We distrust God because we assume he is not truly for us, that if we give him complete control, we will be miserable." We don't trust God enough. His plans are good.

Sometimes it all just feels too big. We thumb through these stories on our phone. It's faster than the old news programs. "And now this..." has become, now, now, now, now. I hear about the anxiety rates of the rising generation,

and I totally understand. We have immediate access, visually, to the most horrific events from around the world. I don't think we have the capacity to care about the whole world at the same time, not to mention the impact of having trivialities intermixed with the monumental events. I don't have the ability to fix the Middle East. I can't change the flooding in North Carolina. I won't make a significant difference in the nuclearization of Iran or the economy in China. What am I supposed to do? And what is this new miracle fat-buster diet? See, here's the thing. The now-now-now, peak-a-boo scrolling of unimaginable horrors intermixed with trivialities plus my inability to make a difference in any of it, that adds up to, you guessed it, compassion fatigue. Apathy. Neil Postman wrote in 1985, "What steps do you plan to take to reduce the conflict in the Middle East? Or the rates of inflation, crime and unemployment? What are your plans for preserving the environment or reducing the risk of nuclear war? What do you plan to do about NATO, OPEC, the CIA, affirmative action, and the monstrous treatment of the Bahai's in Iran? I shall take the liberty of answering for you: You plan to do nothing about them." What could you do? It's all too big. Every screenful grabs your attention enough to keep you interested, intrigued, outraged, or saddened. But you can't change any of it.

Or can you? Jesus invites you into a new life, a life of significance and impact. Do you believe that? We don't have the capacity to deal with the world at the cosmic, universal levels that the social media machine brings to us. Do you know who does? Jesus. He holds the whole world in His hands. "All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:16-17) Jesus has the capacity to see it all at once; and He has the capacity to deal with each one of us individually in the middle of it all. What if it's not about solving the huge matters? What if Jesus

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is inviting you into a life of significance right where you are?

Today we remember our global partners in Mongolia, Cuba, Guatemala and Egypt. They are at the table of communion just like us. Today we invite you to explore taking on a Compassion Child relationship. One person; one child. What difference does that make? Have you ever heard the starfish story? Two boys were walking down a beach and came upon a field of starfish washed up on dry sand by a storm, dying. "We need to chuck them all back into the water," one said. "What's the point," said the other. "There is no way we could save all of them." The boy picked up one starfish and threw it in. "Why'd you do that? We can't save them all." "I saved that one." The boy said. How do we break out of this apathy? Pick up one starfish. Pick up one.

Jesus is inviting you into a life of significance. You and I can't take in the whole world at once. Jesus can. Jesus can also come into a relationship with you. You can hear from Jesus. You can follow Jesus. Now, if Jesus knows the whole story and Jesus knows your story, who better to follow? God, Jesus, knows where your one, single little act of obedience will play out in the cosmic story. Only Jesus can lead and direct your actions, your singular, limited, individual, personal actions in a way that the little things you do have deep and eternal significance. One conversation can change a life. One act of obedience could set a series of events in motion for the Kingdom of God. This Jesus is here to receive you and give you new life. In a minute we will take the Lord's Supper. This is all at once a cosmic, global, universe-sized event and an individual invitation. The Son of God came and took on flesh, and died to pay the sins for all the world. He gave His life so you could have new life. Now He invites you to His table. It is as big as the whole world. It is as small as your seat, your space, Jesus has reserved for you to come and eat. We come to the table by

saying yes to Jesus. Have you opened your heart to Him? Let's pray together today: Lord Jesus Christ, this world is so big, and I am so small, thank you for loving me, for dying for me, for forgiving my sins. I receive you now into my heart, as my Lord and my Savior. I am yours. Lead me in new life for your name's sake. In Jesus name. Amen.

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