

Sometimes I can get into the weeds in the sermons I preach here at Faith. I'll use fancy theology terms or reference the original Greek or Hebrew. That's all well and good. And if you like that kind of thing, please consider joining us for Sunday Bible study or midweek Bible study where we can get to have those in-depth discussions.

Today, we're going to keep it simple. We're going to take some time to unpack John 3:16. **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.** Perhaps we recall people holding up signs at football games which read John 3:16. Have you ever taken the time to think about what it means? We're going to step through it this morning.

First, I. God loves the world. Why is there something instead of nothing? Why do we even exist? Some may say those are dumb questions to ask as obviously we exist. However, it is profound if you think about it. How is it that you're here this morning?

Some would say that the world and human existence is just one big happy accident. Given enough time we evolved by chance from pond scum. Life has no meaning. Life is what you make it. It's a lot more likely we would be a sterile, lifeless planet like Mars or Neptune.

The Bible tells us otherwise. "God so loved the world." God's first act of love was to create the universe. It was completely unnecessary. He didn't need to create you. He didn't need to make the Universe, Solar System, or Planet Earth. It wasn't as though He was lonely. God is sufficient in and of Himself. He is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has a built in community. He didn't need to prove His power to anyone because He is the only one that ever was.

God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all worked together to create the Universe purely out of love. He created it so He could have a conversation with puzzled Nicodemus as recorded in our text today. He created it so that you can enjoy the simple pleasures of this life: a bluff hike, your wedding, holding your newborn in your arms for the first time. Most of all, though, He created the Universe so He could enjoy you. He loves each person on this Earth and wants them to live a life in service to Him.

Yet we all know something is terribly wrong. Yes, the goodness of creation is easy to see on a sunny day on vacation. It's harder to see in the midst of wars, layoffs, earthquakes, and hurricanes.

We live in a world broken by Sin, and God's love is hard to see in the midst of our poor choices and actions. The Bible tells us creation itself groans under the burden of sin. That's why we see blizzards, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods,

earthquakes and the lies. However, we too mar God's beautiful creation through our selfish actions and decisions. We call those sins.

Yet nothing can get in the way of God's perfect plan. God knew that humanity would sin. The Father knew that Adam and Eve would sin in the garden and throw His good creation off the rails. He saw it coming and planned for that major problem. In fact, it is through sin that we can see God's greatest act of love. II. God's love drove Him to send His Son.

Look back at John 3:16. It doesn't say that God so loved the world that He created you. In fact, John 3:16 might be translated this way: "God loved the world with the result that he gave His only Son." Because the Father loves the world, He gave Jesus to be born, to live, to die, and to rise for the sins of the whole world.

It was in allowing the world to fall into sin that we see God's greatest act of love: He Himself coming to a sinful and broken humanity and taking on the expense of their poor actions.

We see God's compassion as Jesus, God in the flesh, shows love in His treatment of Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the governing board of religious leaders. Nicodemus meets Jesus at night and asks Jesus these questions about who He is. Nicodemus was in the dark about who Jesus was as much as it was night when they met.

Through a series of questions, Jesus leads Nicodemus into a deeper understanding of who Jesus really is. Salvation is through birth from above or second birth which occurs only through the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Jesus teaches Nicodemus, "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,**" Jesus points Nicodemus to His crucifixion as the ultimate sign of His glory.

We do see that Nicodemus does come around. He defends Jesus later in John's gospel. After Jesus dies, Nicodemus provides embalming spices worth thousands of dollars in today's money.

So too, Jesus came to this Earth for you. He lived a perfect life that you couldn't. It wasn't as though He lived a sheltered and posh life. He was "**...in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin.**" In His suffering, torture, crucifixion and death He bore your sins, your frailties, and your doubts. On the cross your God suffers with you and for you as you experience the worst days of your life.

Because of His resurrection, we need not fear death because the Son shows us the picture of what is waiting for Christians: an eternal embodied life in the Lord's presence without pain, aging, suffering, or sorrow. The resurrection previewed at Easter is what a restored universe and world looks like.

But this gift of Jesus Christ Himself invites us to a new outlook on life. Because God loved the world, He sent His only Son to die for the sins of the world *in order that* whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

III. The Son promises eternal life to those who trust in Him. To be certain, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historical event, but it is more than that.

Historical events don't necessarily demand a response. Whether or not you believe the Duke of Wellington led troops to defeat Napoleon at the battle of Waterloo in 1815, it really has no bearing on the life you live from day to day.

On the other hand, when it comes to Jesus, eternal life and eternal death are on the line. What you believe about Jesus and what He did means the difference between an eternity with Him in a renewed creation and an eternity away from Him in hell, the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It doesn't matter if you've been a devout Christian all your life or today you somehow stumbled in from off the street. Today Jesus is calling you to believe in Him. He is calling through the pastor who is preaching to you today. He is calling through the Scripture read to you both in church today and in your private readings at home. He is calling through your baptism which writes your name on the back of His hand so He constantly intercedes to the Father on your behalf. He is calling through your baptism which marks you with the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit Himself.

He calls through the Lord's Supper. Which just as Jesus' face to face interaction with Nicodemus demanded an answer, so too this real encounter with Jesus demands a faith response. Ultimately, it isn't about you holding membership at the right acronym of Lutheran Church. Rather, in this meal we join in a confession of our common Christian faith. One which confesses that it is unchristian to believe that what goes on this meal is merely symbolic. It's unchristian to believe that baptism is a symbol which indicates our promise to God. It's unchristian to believe that the Bible contains errors, that women can be pastors, or anything else that would compromise clearly teaching who Jesus is.

As guests view this from the pew, they consider Jesus' invitation to taste and see that the Lord is good by enrolling in an adult or junior confirmation class. As confirmands both young and old study the Scriptures, they eagerly prepare to meet this Jesus in this meal. As those who have been admitted come to the altar, they are welcomed into Christ's presence for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith with the eye towards eternal life.

**GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.** Be reconciled to God and believe in His Son Jesus Christ, receive His forgiveness and trust in Him with all your cares. Amen!