

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, March 14, 2021.

“John 3:16”

Martin Luther called John 3:16, “the Gospel in Miniature.” I have also heard it described as the summary of the Gospel. So at the Packer games when you see someone holding up the John 3:16 sign, they want you to come to believe in Jesus. I even put John 3:16 on my golf balls in the rare event that I happen to lose one.

But did you know this passage is set in midst of a conversation with Nicodemus, a Pharisee, who comes to Jesus at night to inquire about Jesus' teachings? I like to refer this section as the original Nic at Night.

Throughout John's Gospel, the themes of night and day... light and darkness are prevalent. Night or darkness in John's Gospel typically represent a state of unbelief in Jesus. Day or light would be a state of belief in Jesus. This week, Nic comes at night. Next week, the woman at the well comes to Jesus during the day. John even said in our text for today, light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

So, even as people who are in the light of Christ through our faith and baptism, darkness is all around us. Evil is knocking at our door. For example, one scholar wrote, “Sometimes we choose to live without God's love. We cherish grudges even as we wish we could let our anger go. We value our independence even as we wish we cared more for others. We stay in a dark comfortable corner, even as we wish we lived in the light. Our story from beginning to end is selfishness, consequences, repentance, and life.”

So if Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, he has not yet come to believe in Jesus as God's son or God in human flesh. He also didn't want to be exposed for being curious about Jesus' teachings by his Pharisee friends. But God wasn't finished with Nicodemus yet. Nicodemus shows up two other times in the Gospel. In John 7 Nicodemus defends Jesus' teaching to his peers... just hear him out. And in John 19:39, Nicodemus, along with Joseph of Arimethea, took

Jesus body off the cross and prepared it for burial and laid him in a tomb.

Belief in Jesus comes with the promise of eternal life. When we look to Jesus lifted up on the cross it gives us life and hope, knowing the God is with us in suffering and pain and that resurrection is around the corner. John compares Jesus lifted up on the cross to our first lesson from Numbers when the Israelites looked at Moses' staff with a serpent on it and were healed. Remember, people were complaining to God and Moses about the food in the wilderness... essentially rebelling against God. God sent poisonous snakes to bite them and many died. Then the people repented, and prayed, and God gave them a way out.

So let's break down John 3:16. For God so loved the world. What does God's love look like for you? For your neighbors? God loves everything "as is". The Greek word for "love" here is Agape the word for "world" is Kosmos. God sent Jesus into the world because God loved the world without condition. God didn't just come for Christians or the church, but for the whole world. This changes everything. If God loves the world, that means our faith isn't just about us and our personal salvation... or just for America.

This makes me think of how expansive God's love is. And as we are reflecting on the 1 year mark of since the Covid 19 shutdown, I know many of you have experienced profound grief and losses this year. God has a special place in God's heart for those who grieve.

Next is the language of gift. God gave. Jesus comes to the world as a gift. How good are you at receiving gifts? Do you protest when someone gives you a gift? What do you do when you receive a gift? You respond, right? I hope you say thank you, or write a thank you note. Those mean a lot to the giver. The question is, "How do you respond to the gift of God's love?"

Finally, eternal life. For those who believe in Jesus Christ, or put their trust in Jesus Christ, we have this promise of eternal life. Yes, eternal life happens after we die, but it also is the gift of life God wants for the world now. Jesus refers to this life as abundant life in John 10:10,

“I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.” God desires food, clothing, water, shelter, and dignity for all right now.

And in John’s Gospel, just knowing Jesus is eternal life. Jesus prays in John 17:10 “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” This knowing is an intimate knowing. Jesus is someone you spend time with in the word and when you receive the sacrament.

So hopefully you have heard that God loves everyone. We know this because God sent Jesus into the world. This is a gift of grace that we can earn. So this week, how are you going to respond to that gift?