

## 2nd Sunday Lent A 11

---

March 19, 2011

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.  
Amen.

In general within our reading for today is the most loved, or maybe most quoted verse in the Bible. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”* But not to be forgotten is the verse which follows. *“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

This last Sunday I talked a lot about sin and the devil, if we as a people still believed or thought they still existed. Then this week a similar controversy arose after a Christian author, Rob Bell, questioned if there was even a hell. Many of the fundamentalist leaders condemned him calling him a heretic, discounting his message of the power of the love of God and Jesus journey to bring salvation to all people. Maybe that is a sermon for another time, but I think Rob was holding firm to these verses, holding tight to the love and promises of God.

But before I get too far, it seems we need to look back to the very beginning to understand or get at the central point God is trying to help us to understand. In creation God created the heavens and the earth and all that is within them, including human kind. God desired to have a relationship with all his creation, including human kind. Yet as boundaries were broken God put Adam and Eve out of the garden, but did not sever his relationship.

Throughout the ages God continued to try to work with and guide human kind with angels and prophets. Yet humans continued to turn away from God. They tried to build a tower up to the heavens to meet and see God. God responds by dispersing them across the face of the earth, even as he tries to work with and among his creation to build a better relationship with his creation. Later when it seemed as if it was a lost cause, God started over with Noah and his family. Once again trying to work will all the peoples of the earth. Once again the people disappointed God.

## 2nd Sunday Lent A 11

---

March 19, 2011

Then God tries to work it in a new way. God calls Abram, a good and faithful person telling him I have a journey for you to go on. As you go I will be with you, leading you to a land I will give to you and your descendents. God begins anew, this time not with all the people of the earth, but working through one family so that all the people of the earth might be blessed and come to know God's love for them.

We know the flawed journeys of the family of Abraham and Sarah and their descendents. We know the liars and the cheater, the murderers and the adulterers along with the faithful men and women who followed. God chose us, a fickle group of humans who will praise him and thank him one day; then turn around the next cursing or ignoring him believing we are more capable of accomplishing our desires on our own.

Into this mix of faithful people and unruly hooligans, Jesus is born. Jesus the Son of God born of a woman enters into the human story so we might better come to know who this God who created us is. I very much like the Gospel of John. The Gospel writer takes us in circles using images and symbols to make a point in the story. All the while Jesus is plain in his speaking yet those who listening do not seem to get it.

This encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus is no different. Here in the dark of night, a time when only the bad people ventured out, those who did not want to be seen. The darkness also implies doubt or fear, or misdirection as people work to avoid being detected. Here in the darkness comes Nicodemus, proclaiming the goodness of Jesus. Resulting in a dialog of questions back and forth as Jesus speaks about heavenly and spiritual things; which does not connect with the worldly view of his visitor. Nicodemus is a wise man of his day, yet he fails to pick up on the clues Jesus is giving him.

Until finally Jesus tells him and us plainly who he is and why he came. *"If I told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascend into heaven except the one who descended*

## 2nd Sunday Lent A 11

---

March 19, 2011

*from heaven, the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”*

Here early in the Gospel of John, Jesus speaks of his final destination. Here we are told of his being lifted up on the cross so that we might have life. Here we get a clear indication of the mission, the journey Jesus is traveling during his time on earth. Then Jesus gives us these verses which are central to our faith. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”* Then just as important; *“indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

Jesus came not only that we may not perish, but that we might not be condemned along the way. After all we are a part of that same fickle human family who has a love / hate relationship with our creator. In a very literal translation of these verses one might say “God so loved his ungrateful, selfish, sinful, undeserving world that he sent his Son to save it from destruction.”

Even greater is the fact God did this without asking us our opinion. God sent his Son out of love and the desire to rebuild, to reconnect and to reestablish a relationship with his creation.

A father and his young son were having a disagreement. It was time for his 6 year old son to go to bed and the son refused. The young child refused to go to bed and the father refused to give in. Finally out of total frustration the young boy yelled at his father, ‘I hate you.’ The father replied, ‘I am sorry you feel that way son, but I love you.’

To which the son replied. ‘Daddy don’t say that.’ Surprised the father continued to say, ‘it true, I love you.’ Only to have the son reply, ‘stop saying that Daddy. Stop saying that right now.’ Finally the father came over and said, ‘listen to me, I love you, like it or not.’

## 2nd Sunday Lent A 11

---

March 19, 2011

Even at 6 years old the son understood that in the face of unconditional love he was powerless. The father did not negotiate with saying, 'I will love you if you go to bed like a nice young boy.' Then it would have opened up their relationship to ongoing negotiations. But once the father refused to negotiate, refused to make the love for his son conditional upon the actions of the son, the son could do nothing else but accept his father's love or flee from it.

This is exactly what these two verses are all about. If God had made his love conditional upon our actions, upon our asking for God to love us, upon our righteous acts then we would have the power. Then we would be able to negotiate the terms of our relationship with God.

But because God just loves us, completely and unconditionally, that when God sent his Son to die for us; there is nothing we can do. Yes, we can still try to turn away, still try to run from God or reject him, but the fact remains; God loves us more than we can imagine.

So what does this mean for us how have been save by grace through the gift of faith, for us who are so totally surrounded by the love of God in Christ Jesus. There is nothing we can do but to respond in love, honoring God, sharing the Good News of his Son, Jesus.

We now go forth as Christ's messengers to tell others that they too are loved by God, like it or not. To proclaim to them "*God so loved the world, God so loves you, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*"

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

*Pastor Michael*