

John 3: 1-17

From the way the world often works, we might take it for granted that if God loves anyone, it will be those who love God; but Jesus doesn't say, "God so loved the Church," or "God so loved the faithful," or "God so loved the saintly."

This good news is about God's deep and abiding love for the entire world.

And so, we can say with confidence, "God so loved the atheist," "God so loved the murderer," "God so loved the arrogant," "God so loved the self-satisfied," "God so loved the bully" ...and of course we can go on to include every single person who has ever lived.

I think sometimes we might do something or be a certain way.

We might hate ourselves and therefore can't imagine...can't even get our head around the fact that God could ever possibly love us.

Perhaps in the past, you gave into peer pressure in order to try and fit in.

It is very hard to accept unconditional love when we hate ourselves.

Here's a story shared by a minister. There was a woman, who believed in Jesus, loved God and went to church. She said to me point blank: "I believe in heaven, but I will never be there. I'm not good enough."

Shocked, I asked her why.

It turned out that she had been abused by her father when she was a child. When she got older, she married a man who abused her as well and told her again and again how stupid she was, how worthless she was, how bad she was...and she believed him. So, she could not, in her wildest dreams imagine herself being good enough to go to heaven.

That long conversation turned into a VERY LONG all-day conversation where we talked about grace and how we are all sinners, we have all fallen short of the Kingdom of God, but God loves each and every one of us no matter who we are, what we have done, what other people think or say about us or how we feel about ourselves."

I wonder how many of the people who live in the homes around our church think they are not good enough for God to love them, die for them, save them?

I wonder how many people we pass in the supermarket aisles, stand in a queue with, live next door to, think that they are not lovable enough to go to heaven?

I wonder how many folks think they are too sinful, have done too many terrible things in their past, have had too many bad thoughts that God couldn't possibly love them?

This kind of mindset not only stunts a person's ability to live in freedom it can also contribute to mental illness, trigger depression and anxiety disorders. I mean, after-all, if you don't think you are loved by God—what is the point? If you don't think you could ever

possibly go to heaven, where is the hope? No wonder we have so much violence, anger, and political obsessions.

“God so loved the world...” but how often does the world hear a different message?

Do you know God loves you...

...sins, flaws, warts and all?

Do you really know it?

Because knowing it changes everything.

Guilt kills; grace brings new life.

Jesus says, “whoever believes in me shall not perish but have eternal life...”

And pay close attention to this part in verse 17: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Jesus came into this world on a life-giving, life-saving mission. This is not a rejection mission. It’s a rescue mission. It is the offer of life to all who are perishing. And we are all perishing. We are all naturally heading to hell. But Jesus came to save us from this. But it appears to be true that not everyone who is dying wants to be saved or trust the One Who is offering salvation.

Therefore, there is a judgment, a dividing line between those who accept the love of God who won’t put their trust in Him.

God will not force God’s salvation on us...

...He won’t force the hand of those of us who opt out.

There is a judgment, says Jesus.

There is a condemnation, but it is not the judgment of God.

God does not damn us.

The judgment occurs when we choose to hide from the light of God’s sacrificial love...

...choosing to stay in the darkness is self-condemnation.

God loves you and me...like it or not!

And although we might run from God’s love, God’s light, that doesn’t stop God from pursuing us.

Because not only did Jesus come to die for us...

...God also is the One Who comes to us and uses situations, other people and even the devil's schemes to bring us to Himself.

It's really as if we are helpless baby's and God is running after us in order to keep us from falling off a cliff.

God keeps God's eye on us...

...God goes after us...

...God reaches out God's hand...

...this is all God's doing, not our doing.

It's the relentless pursuit of God's unconditional, unfathomable love for you and me—like it or not.

And if we take the opportunity God offers us and take God's hand—we will not go off the cliff.

We will be saved.

And God will never let go of our hand.

He will guide us in the way we need to go in order for us to have life and life to the abundance.

God will show us the way, He will guide us to our reason for living, He will give us the strength and the love to carry on and succeed.

And when all is said and done, and this life comes to an end, God's hand will still be holding our hand.

We will forever be in His presence, in His love that never ends.

And this is the truth!

And this is the kind of God we have.

And this is the kind of God so many of us run from.

Over and over again, in the Scriptures Jesus comes upon someone who is caught in a life of sin and misery.

And Jesus doesn't condemn them. Instead, He offers them life, salvation.

And if they accept, everything becomes new for them.

Think about the Woman at the Well in John Chapter 4 or Mary Magdalene, or the madman who once wandered naked in the tombs of the Gerasene's, or Zacchaeus, or the countless prostitutes, lepers, sinners...It was Jesus who found them, not the other way around.

It was Jesus who offered them salvation by grace through faith.

It was up to them to accept or decline.

In Ephesians Chapter 2:8-10 Paul writes: "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do the good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Yes, God guides us to our purpose in life, once we accept His free gift of salvation.

And since even the ability to believe...even faith is a gift offered to us by God...we can refuse it...we can refuse to believe.

We can choose the darkness over the light, evil over good, misery over joy and peace, hell over heaven, Satan over God.

And thus, make the biggest mistake we could ever, ever make.
We can miss the whole reason for our existence.

And what for?

A wise person once wrote: "For the truth is that God has loved us, does love us and will love us with the same intensity that sent Jesus to the Cross.

It is not that we are so lovable, but that God is love.

Loving is what God does.

Loving is what God is.

God simply delights in loving us.

It is the essence of His being.

But God is also the wellspring of truth.

If you have been shown the light and prefer darkness, that choice is yours.

While there is yet life in us, the light of Christ will burn for us.

The saving love of Christ will beckon.

Eternal life or eternal death...in every passing minute of our precisely allotted life-times, it is the ultimate choice we make.”

God loves us, you, me—everyone—like it or not.

That includes convicted killers, prostitutes and someone whose worldview and politics may set our teeth on edge.

The way of God’s love doesn’t make sense when compared to the way the world defines the good, the bad and the ugly.

And praise the Lord for that!!!

So, if you have not done so already, step into the light.

Ask God to forgive you and transform you.

And then allow Him to.

It will happen.

It’s been happening for 2,000 years.

It has happened to me.

Has it happened to you?

If it has happened, walk daily, minute by minute, second by second with the God Who so loves you that He rescued You by taking you by the hand and will never let you go.

Live into being WHO God created you to be.

There is nothing better.

It’s a life-long journey...and there is nothing better. Amen.