



October 2, 2016

**A World Communion Sermon by
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"Loving the World... Without Being Worldly"

John 3:1-16

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And 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.'

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'

I had a tough day a week or two ago. Nothing horrible, but just one of those days where the tasks seemed to pile up. There were more emails than I could answer and my cell phone kept ringing with a host of different things, all demanding my attention. When I got home that evening I was muttering under my breath about the difficult day I had, looking for sympathy and understanding from Karen. It seems that she also had a tough day, sorting through the medical bills, calling insurance companies, and laying the groundwork for our eventual retirement. And so both of us commiserated about how life seemed to be getting more complicated, more demanding and more tiring. In the course of our "whining session" Karen remarked, "sometimes this is a difficult and unforgiving world."

At times it does seem like a difficult, hard, and unforgiving world. Not just on the bad days.

- This is a world where natural disaster strikes without warning.
- This is a world where human cruelty often reigns; where people are persecuted because of their beliefs, their ethnic heritage, or their place of birth.
- This is a world with bullying, and cruelty.
- This is a world that is encroaching on any type of solitary time we might need... cell phones, text messages, email and the like constantly bombard us, demanding our attention and our time.

- This is a world that is filled with anger and rage, with demanding people, and there are days when the sun never comes out.
- This is a difficult, hard world.

Christ proclaimed in John's gospel that this world... this world.... is the world God loves. God so loved this world, with all its imperfections, all its craziness, all the demands it makes, all its evil... God so loved this world that he gave his son for its salvation. God loves this world and God chooses not to condemn it, not to ignore it; not to destroy it. God loves this world and all of creation so much that God chooses, in freedom, to rescue it.

This is the message for this morning. This world that you and I inhabit; this world that sometimes weighs heavily on us; this world that often seems hard and unforgiving, is the object of God love. God has not abandoned this world, and we should not either.

3 points: 1- God's love for this world. 2- Loving what God loved. 3- Loving God's world without being consumed by it.

I

God so loved this world. There is a tendency in Christianity to spiritualize the message of the bible. Certainly the bible addresses spiritual matters, but the core message of the bible is addressed to living in this material world. From the opening verses of the Bible we read that God created the world. This material world did not exist until God created it and called it good. The primary message of the New Testament is that God, in Jesus Christ, became flesh. The hope that we declare on Easter and at funerals and memorial services is the resurrection of the body... not the immortality of the spirit.

Hellenistic philosophy from Socrates and Plato to the Stoics denigrated things material in favor of the ideal and spiritual. But Christian faith is not Greek philosophy. We believe that God created this world and it is God's world. We believe that God created human beings and loves them. We believe that God became flesh, assumed a material existence to live among us. The fundamental difference between Christianity and Eastern religions is that we are called to love the world, live within the world, and transform the world..... not deny the world, nor escape the world.

Christian faith takes seriously the world that God created. It is not merely a faith that declares, "We'll get pie in the sky, bye and bye.." It is faith that proclaims the value of this world and the creatures who inhabit it... including you and me! It proclaims salvation for the whole person (body and soul), and proclaims this salvation in the present. "This day you will be in paradise with me!" Jesus not only proclaimed the kingdom of heaven... but also taught us to pray: "thy kingdom come on earth... as it is in heaven."

God so loved this world....

II

Loving what God loves. I love fishing. Often times Karen or my daughter will join me when I am fishing. They are not crazy about fishing and can probably take or leave it... but they come along and enjoy themselves, because they love me. That is one of the qualities of love.. we learn to love the things that our loved ones hold dear.

God so loved the world. We love God and are called to love this world because God loves it. We are called to love what God regards as precious; what God gave his son, Jesus Christ, to save. We are called to be good stewards of creation... to take care of God's world, because God loves it.

If someone lent you a prized possession, a classic car, or some other valuable item, would you abuse it? How would they feel? God has placed us on this earth and we are entrusted with something that is precious to God. How can we abuse, pollute, destroy, hurt, injure, and desecrate that which God loves so much?

God so loved the world.

III

Loving God's world without being consumed by it. This is the challenge that Christians face. We often substitute ownership and control for loving. Love is a relationship. Ownership and control is the antithesis of a relationship. When we love another, that love does not manifest itself in controlling behavior. Nor do we own someone when we love them. Loving the world that God loves involves the following;

1. Recognizing that we do not own the world. I got up this morning and put on my clothes, drank my coffee, read my paper, got in my car, and came to my office "my, my, my, mine!!!!" No! The Psalmist declared, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof!" Loving the world involves relinquishing ownership of it.
2. Loving the world requires care. We don't abuse that which we love. We don't neglect that which we love. God created this world and all that is in it... including humanity. Loving God's world is a recognition that we are called to care for it. It is also a recognition that we are our sister and brother's keeper.... Even when we don't like them. They are part of the world that God loves.
3. Loving the world is a recognition that we are sojourners in this world. We are passing through. We are here to enjoy it, but knowing also that we will leave it. Others will follow us.

God so loved the world. The challenge of Christian faith is to love this world... the way God loves it. Amen.