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For God So Loved the World

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John 3:16-17

16 '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.

17 '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.

Our text today contains one of foundational passages of the Christian faith. These two verses have brought hope and comfort to many. When I have been in some of my darkest moments, I have found that by meditating on just these two short verses, my hope and faith have been restored.

I believe these two sentences provide the basis of the Christian faith.

And so we read...

For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

For God so loved the world....

For God so loved the world...

There are few absolute truths in this life, but here is one of them.

God loves. You might even say that God is love or love is God, or to love is to be like God.

God loves the world like a mother loves her child, the fruit of her womb.

In Psalm 24:1&2 says

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;

for he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the waters.

The world is God's own creation. As the psalmist says, the God created the world, and everything in it, and all who live in it – every man, woman, and child. The world is the fruit of God's womb.

Marcus Borg says that God is passionate about the world and compassionate to all who inhabit it. The word for passion and compassion in the Greek and the Hebrew actually comes from the root word for womb.

To be passionate about something is to care for it as a mother cares for her child. A mother is loving, nurturing, nourishing and perhaps protective when the child is harmed in any way.

It is a sad fact of this world that not everyone's mother is like this. Some mothers (or fathers for that matter) harm their children rather than protect them. But, when we say that God is like a mother, we are saying that God is like the ultimate ideal, the perfect example, of a mother.

God is the mother who is loving, nurturing, nourishing, and protective.

Note that John didn't say "For God so loved the Jew or the Gentiles, or humans. No, John says, "For God so loved the world." God's love is not just for the humans, but for everything on the face of the earth. Everything. God's love encompasses everything and everyone in the world.

So much so that God gave his only Son...

Here is another absolute truth. God is giving. Or giving is God's nature, or even to be giving is to be like God.

God's love is so big, so abounding, so encompassing that God can't help but give out of God's own self. The love of God overflows so much that, like a mother, God gave out of God's own being a Son. God gave the world his only Son.

As Christians, we believe that Son was Jesus Christ. A living breathing man who walked the face of this earth two thousand years ago.

God cared for the world so much, loved the world so much, that God entered into humanity and experienced all the things that we do: hunger, pain, grief, suffering, and sadness, as well as, joy, happiness, love and fulfillment. Through Jesus, God became a part of the world, became one of us, and experienced life just as we do.

God did not send the son just to experience life as we know it. It was not out of a selfish desire to experience life, but out of a self-giving desire for us to experience life as *God* knows it.

God loved the world so much that God sent the son So that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

God sent the son so that we may not perish but participate in eternal life. God gave God's own life so that we may have life instead of death. Some of us believe that eternal life or heaven is for those who believe and hell is for those who are perishing.

Others think of, or experience death and hell on this side of life. For some, hell is the absence of the presence of God in their life today. For some, hell is the absence of love in their life today.

For these, belief in God through Jesus brings eternal life now, not just a vision of heaven in the future, but eternal life now. The love that was

missing in their life comes through belief in love of God found in Jesus Christ now.

It is not just a matter of some future reward, but a life participating in the love of God today. For some, maybe even for many, to know God's love, to know that they are loved by God now, in this life would make all the difference in the world to them. It is the difference in life or death. It is the difference between heaven or hell today.

For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world...

We often think that God will come soon to condemn the world. It is an idea that is drawn out of the Old Testament, the First Testament. We look around us at the state of the world, some may mention the lack of morality, the presence of wars or poverty and think, when is God coming to judge the world? When is God going to condemn all this?

But, here it is. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world. God sent the Son because God loves the world. God sent the Son because God wants us to share in God's own life, to participate with God in loving the world and each other as God loves us.

God's own son was a living example of God's love for the world, for everyone and everything in it. Jesus did not condemn the world or "sinners". Jesus loved sinners and ate with sinners and healed sinners.

Jesus did, however, condemn the human made systems of the world that produced sinners. Jesus was very condemning of the Roman Empire because it was oppressive and unjust society. And Jesus condemned the temple because it had become like Rome. The priests of the temple had stopped serving God and had started serving the Roman Empire. Jesus condemned the oppressive systems that produced poor people, that made a few wealthy while others starved, that encouraged the unjust use of power.

But Jesus did not condemn the poor for being poor, or the oppressed for being oppressed. "Blessed are the poor" Jesus taught. Blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Too often we judge the poor for being poor. Rather than condemning the systems that we have created that make people poor, we judge the poor. We say (and I use to say this too), “Look at that one on welfare or that one on food stamps. Why can’t they just get a job?”

Too often we judge the poor, condemn the poor, instead of condemning the human systems that encourage poverty, that encourage the use of drugs, encourage the use of violence. Like Jesus, we should not judge the poor, but the oppressive systems that create too many poor people.

In Matthew 7, Jesus said,

1"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. **2**For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Just as God does not condemn the world,

just as Jesus did not condemn the sinner,

it is not for us to condemn others,

it is not for us to judge.

We are not to condemn the sinner, but the sin.

We do not know what that person’s life is like.

We do not know what kind of hell they live in or what kind of hell they experienced in their life. We do not know, so we are not able, we cannot judge the other.

What we can do, what Jesus has commanded us to do is to love one another.

In John 13:34 Jesus says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

What we can do today is spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel that proclaims the love of God for all the world,

the gospel that does not condemn the world, but proclaims a better way to live, The gospel that proclaims that eternal life can be found in the love of God through belief in Jesus Christ.

For God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, that whosoever believes in him, shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the son to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Amen.