

For God So Loved Us

Our gospel passage today is rather famous. The central verse in this passage is perhaps the best-known Bible verse in the world. For us, in our Season of Lent/Season of Love, it becomes quite appropriate for us today. “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.”

John 3:16 shows up in many public places. Hoisted on posters at sporting events, etched on jewelry, and isolated from this passage, “For God so loved the world...” has become emblematic of the central message of Christian faith. This centrality is not undeserved. The power of this verse, however, is enhanced when it is read carefully and in context.

Let’s take a bit of a deep dive into John 3:16, in which the “so” is often misunderstood. It come from the Greek *houtos*, which means “so” in the sense of “just so,” or “in this way,” or the more archaic, “thusly.” We could translate the verse as “This is the way God loved the world, with the result that he gave his only Son, in order that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 is not about how much God loved the world. It is *about in what way* God loved the world.

The single most important thing to notice about this verse is that God loved the world. God deeply loved the world that God created, and God longs for this creation to live. It is not only God’s own people whom God will save. It is the world that God has loved, precisely by having given the only son. God loved by having given the son, a non-coercive act that sets in motion real consequences.

God’s way of loving the world was to send the Son to save it. Jesus is God’s expression of love and longing. The light comes to find us, to illuminate our path for our sake, because God

wants us. God reaches out through the Son with the sheer purpose of sharing everlasting life with us.

The reading does go does deal with the contrasts of light and darkness, and how all things good come from the light and all things that are bad come from the darkness. We must go back to the beginning of the Gospel of John to understand this.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

Yes, John tells us there are real consequences in our daily life and our everlasting relationship with God. As humans, we recognize our own weaknesses, faults, and sins. We come to terms with the fact that anything we do is the direct result of a choice that we have made. But he tells us in order to help us see the contrasts, look clearly at our lives, appreciate the gracious gift of God as a gift of love, and live in fearless confidence of love that we have to make the choice to accept it. Have we ever been so truly and consistently desired by another as we are by God? No indeed. God loved the world in this way that he gave the Son so that we might live forever with God.

Lent is almost over. As quickly as it came in, it will leave us. While some will rejoice at this, we also have to ask ourselves a question. In this Season of Lent/Season of Love have we done everything that we truly can in order to embrace God's unconditional love for us? It is not too late. We can find that love for God so loved the world, for God so loves us. Let us keep searching for the way in which God loves us.

The joyfulness of Eastertide will be here before we know it. Let us continue to use this time to remember how God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son. May we continue to make the right choice as we embrace the love of God through the love of Christ. Amen.