

Lent 4  
“One Directional in Jesus!” (John 3:14-16)  
March 10, 2024  
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 4th Sunday in Lent is from our Gospel reading, John 3:16.

**“14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**

So far the text.

In the youth confirmation class this week, we spent more time on the two main teachings of the Bible – the Law and the Gospel. This is so important to make sure that these two teachings are never intermingled or confused.

The 10 commandments, God’s Law, are what everyone is morally bound to keep. It is summarized in the two great commands **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,”** and **“your neighbor as yourself...Do this and you will live.”** Jesus told a certain lawyer who wanted to know what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. **Luke 10:25-28.**

Do this, love perfectly, never break a single commandment and you will live. One problem... no one has done this except Jesus, who never sinned though He was severely tempted by the devil. The Law shows us our sin. It makes us look at ourselves in the mirror and it shows us every imperfection, every fault, every disobedience to God. The Law, as glorious as it is to keep order and guide us, cannot ever, ever, ever save us. It gives us no relief to our conscience. It only makes us look at ourselves. And that’s not a pretty picture.

But there is, thanks be to Jesus, a second main teaching of the Bible. And it is more glorious than the Law. It is the Gospel. What is the Gospel? Good News. What good news? The good news that we just heard in John 3:16! For the Gospel doesn't condemn us, but it saves us! How? It shows us our Savior, Jesus, who paid for the world's sins and that includes yours and mine. It shows us the work of God alone who kept the Law for us! Loved God perfectly and all mankind. It shows us that the love of God is for all people... that Jesus would be lifted up on the cross and die to save everyone. And whoever looks at Jesus in faith, not oneself...is saved from eternal death!

The first passage that the confirmands looked at as a summary of the Gospel was John 3:16. Then came a question on their homework sheet that each of us must know the answer to... "Why do you believe you will go to heaven?" And very quickly one of the youth said, "Because God's Word says so." Which Word? Law, Gospel, or a mix of both? Gospel was again the quick and sure reply.

Yes! That's the right answer! God's Word does not lie. God loved the whole world...all people...gave His Son for all people...so that whoever believes in Jesus will not perish...will not die eternally...will not be condemned to hell...but will have everlasting life...will go to heaven! **"Scripture cannot be broken"**.  
**(John 10:35)**

Our human nature, corrupted by sin, thinks that there has to be something that I can do, something that I can offer to work with God to go to heaven. But there isn't. The Law can never be mixed with the Gospel. And to make sure this is clear to us Jesus gives us the very clear illustration in the verses right before John 3:16. You know they must be important if Jesus uses them to introduce His most beautiful Gospel verse.

So of all the Scriptures that Jesus could have chosen, He chose the passage of the Israelites dying from poisonous snake bites, fiery serpents. Why were they being bitten and dying? They admitted why in our Old Testament reading from Numbers 21, didn't they? **"We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord"**

Key word. "Against". They spoke against God that He brought them out to die in the wilderness and that God didn't feed them and that they loathed the worthless bread He gave them. Does that sound like loving God with all your soul, strength

and heart? Do you sometimes speak against God? Not trust in Him? Complain against Him? That's the Law which shows you that you have failed in your quest for perfection and like the Israelites, there is a deadly poison coursing through your body. It's called sin. And just like the Israelites could not save themselves from death, neither can we.

Born with sin, we were born as our epistle from Ephesians 2 tells us "children of wrath". **"dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others."**

The Law describes each of us exactly who we are. Against God...sons of disobedience, walking not with God, but in the opposite direction with the prince of the power of the air...the devil. Just as the others. Everyone is in the same dire predicament.

So Jesus told Nicodemus, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."**

Help us! Cried out the people to Moses. And God who is loving and merciful did! Make a bronze serpent, put it on a pole and everyone who looks at it will not die. It's that simple. Look at the bronze snake, believe God's promise and live. That bronze snake can't hurt you. And guess what? Neither does the Son of God hanging on the cross!

For all who look at Him and believe in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life! And that is how one is born again, through faith given by the Holy Spirit.

Must a man enter a second time in your mother's womb? questioned Nicodemus.

**"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."**

It is impossible for our sinful flesh to enter heaven, but the Holy Spirit gives us a new spirit in baptism. And in faith we receive Jesus' forgiveness in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's the Gospel.

Back in the 2010's there was a very popular group called "One Direction". It was an all boy band that was very successful. The individual singers, however, were not successful until they came together as a group. Individually, they tried out to make it big on the British talent search show the X-factor. Who had the X-factor? The special talent that stood out above the rest? They all failed until Simon Cowell saw that together, they would be special. Singing in the same one direction, instead of separately in many different directions was the key to success. The singers realized this, and named themselves "One Direction". The rest, as the saying goes, is history. Of course, their high level of success lasted only as long as the group stayed together.

In a much more profound and important spiritual sense, today's reading from John 3:16, tells us that all who look in the one direction of Jesus, all who look upon Jesus as the Savior, will not perish, but have everlasting life. You don't have to be an amazing singer to have this level of glory and fame, because it is solely the merciful work of God!

Listen again to our epistle reading from Ephesians 2:

**"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,"**

We were dead – no X-factor in any of us, nothing attractive in us, against God, but because of His great love with which He loved us, made us alive with Christ. And raised us up together and made us sit together in heaven in Jesus!

God did it all! That's the Gospel! It's a gift, a pure gift! Listen to the next verses: **"8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast."**

Not of yourselves. There is no requirement of the law needed to be met by you in order to be saved. For it is through faith, the gift of faith which the Holy Spirit

gives you so that you can say only by His power, that “Jesus is Lord”. 1 Corinthians 12:3. So all who spoke the Apostles Creed make this profession of faith. So, Doug and Cindy Helmrick once again today joyfully profess their faith in the gift of salvation that each has received.

One Direction. Our eyes are fixed on Jesus who was lifted up on the cross. Listen to Jesus speak of His lifting up in John 12.

**“31 Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” 33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die.”**

Jesus died for all peoples! He paid for the sin of all peoples so that He would draw all peoples to Himself. This is the universal atonement! This is the Gospel that opens up heaven to all people and shows all people that there is only one way to heaven - through Jesus! – One directional in Jesus!

And in through this gift of faith, God has graciously given us the joy of serving Him through the works that He has prepared for us to. The people of God’s kingdom follow Jesus in one direction through the works of love He gives to them to do.

**“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10.**

Your God’s workmanship, created anew! Reborn! He has made you who you are – a child of God – not wrath. He has created you anew to bear the fruit of good works. It is the fruit of the Gospel -the result of the Gospel. For works follow faith in the same direction. Our salvation is not the result of our good works, but our good works are the result of our new birth of salvation by the Holy Spirit.

Yes, Jesus, shines His X-Factor of love and forgiveness through us! A complete 180 degrees, one direction, by grace, through faith in Jesus! Amen

**“And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**