

Order of Service for 3-14-21 Recording

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: “Glory Be to Jesus” - Hymn #433

Confessing our sins and receiving God’s forgiveness...

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: “Believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.” (Acts 16:31)

C: **That seems so simple, believe and we are saved. Why wouldn’t we believe? It is so easy. We’d have to be crazy not to believe!**

P: “Go from your country and your father’s house to the land I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1)

C: **Because Abram believed in God, he left his homeland to follow Jesus.**

P: “If anyone would come after Me he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 8:34)

C: **Can I do that? It doesn’t sound so simple that way. I see so often that I only want to follow You, Jesus, when it’s convenient, when I am in big trouble, when there seems to be no other way. I see that in so many ways I don’t believe. As the man said, “Lord I believe. Help my unbelief.”**

P: Jesus lived a perfect life of faith for us. As a servant of Christ and by His command I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life!”**

Entrance Psalm

P: The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

C: **The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**

P: Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;

C: **though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.**

P: One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:

C: **that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,**

P: to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD

C: **and to inquire in His temple.**

P: For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble;

C: **He will conceal me under the cover of His tent; He will lift me high upon a rock.**

**ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

P: The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

C: **The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?**

Hymn of Praise: “Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed” - Hymn #560

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Prayer of the Day

P: Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our sicknesses of both body and soul and stretch forth the hand of Your majesty to heal and defend us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and rules with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen

Old Testament Lesson: Numbers 21:4-9

R: From Mount Hor the children of Israel set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Ephesians 2:1-10

R: And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

The Holy Gospel: John 3:14-21

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. John, the 3rd chapter

C: Glory to You. O Lord.

P: [Jesus said] And 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, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come

into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C:Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: *“There Is A Redeemer”*

Sermon: *“Gospel in a Nutshell”* – **John 3:14-21**

What’s the most familiar Bible verse? Maybe it is Psalm 23:1, when we’re reminded that the Lord is my shepherd. Maybe it is Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Maybe it is the one we’ve heard at the beginning of our Lent Midweek services, Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

For many, the answer is in our Gospel lesson today. John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The Gospel in a nutshell. It was so popular, so well known, that you could find it on signs in the back of the end zone, back when there were real people there instead of cardboard cutouts.

As popular as it is, as well-known as it is, though, it isn’t always understood. Even the one who first heard John 3:16 didn’t understand it, at least at first.

Our Gospel reading today is a monologue, but it started as a dialogue. Nicodemus was a high-ranking Pharisee who came to Jesus at night asking questions, seeking to understand who Jesus was. He was curious, but confused. He had questions for Jesus, but didn’t want others to know about them, or that he was coming to Jesus for answers. By the time we get to verse 14, his comments are done for this encounter. He seems to have been left speechless by Jesus’ talk of the need to be born again, and talk of the Holy Spirit being like wind. He came to Jesus at night, and left as much in the dark as he came. It would take Jesus being lifted up for him to see the truth.

But if we want to understand this verse, let’s look at it piece by piece. If we look at each part, we can understand the whole better.

“For God so loved” God loved. God loves. God is love. What does this mean? Pastor Max Lucado once described God’s love like this; “If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning... Face it, friend. He is crazy about you!” For God so loved.

For God so loved the world. This isn’t just about loving a certain group of people. It isn’t even just about loving people. It’s about loving the world. It’s about loving the cosmos. It’s about loving all that has been created.

It’s also about loving the world in the sense that includes people who don’t love God. People who could care less about God. People who reject God. People who say, “I don’t need God.” The Bible teaches that God so loved the world, yet the world doesn’t love God in return. As

John says in the prologue of his Gospel, [Jesus] was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him” (John 1:10-11).

That is part of what makes this truly amazing, what is truly amazing, that the intensity of God’s emotion, the intensity of God’s love, is not just directed towards Christians. That the intensity of God’s love is not just directed towards church people. That the intensity of God’s love is not just directed to you and your little life or me and my little life. The intensity of God’s love is for the world. Even those who reject it.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. His unique, one of a kind, irreplaceable son. God didn’t just give something easily replaceable. God didn’t give something that was a dime a dozen. God gives something that is priceless. His only Son.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him.” This gift doesn’t come with a bunch of disclaimers. It doesn’t come with those terms of service agreements we just click through without reading. It comes freely. Even belief is a gift of the Holy Spirit! We can refuse to believe. We can refuse to trust. But that doesn’t change the nature of the gift that is free to us, but cost God everything.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Eternal life is not just about what happens after we die. It’s not just about heaven or being with Jesus or the world to come. It’s about the here and now. In some ways, it’s similar to the way the other Gospel writers use the phrase “kingdom of God.”

God loves you. God loves the whole world. God gave Jesus in love for the world so we could have eternal life. It’s why we can use grace as an acronym. “God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense.”

Jesus was lifted up on the cross so the whole world could see God’s love in action. Many who saw it didn’t see what it truly meant. Many walked by and laughed. They looked but did not truly see. But some looked up and saw Jesus as he truly was, as he truly is. A Roman centurion, no stranger to death, looked up and said “Surely, he was the son of God!” Nicodemus, once Jesus was lifted up, would come out of the darkness into the light, to help Joseph of Arimathea carry Jesus from the cross to the tomb. The power of God working through those words of Jesus must have kept working on Nicodemus until he knew the answer to all of the questions he’d had was Jesus. Nicodemus then went to Jesus even after all of his other disciples had run away to hide. Once Jesus was lifted up, some would turn to him in faith, and they would be saved.

Eventually others would come to see what Nicodemus and the centurion did. Because Jesus was lifted up on the cross, what was once a symbol of death would become a symbol of life. What was once used to remind people of their powerlessness before the Roman Empire became a reminder of how powerful God is.

When Martin Luther was struggling with his doubts and depression, his father confessor, John Staupitz, pointed him to Christ. Luther found Christ most fully revealed on the cross. He found disdain and derision, desertion by friends, death surrounded by those who deserved to die, and God. He found the paradox of great humiliation and great exaltation as Jesus was lifted up on

the cross. The cross revealed the judgment of God that no human work could make humanity successful. It was God's everlasting no to the idolatry of making yourself like God, the idolatry the serpent tempted Adam and Eve with. But the cross was also God's yes to his children, the greatest example of love the world will ever see.

God did not send Jesus into the world to judge the world. The punishment is already all around us. God sent Jesus out of love. That's why Martin Luther called John 3:16 the gospel in a nutshell, and others have followed his lead. It continues to be one of the most popular, well-known Bible verses.

When we hear John 3:16, it is the Gospel in a nutshell. It summarizes the Good News about Jesus. God loved you enough to send Jesus. God still loves you, and nothing can separate you from that love. Because God loves you, you have been justified; you have been made right with God. It's a free gift to you that cost Jesus everything. That is the Good News for today, and the best news you'll ever hear.

Confession of Faith: 3rd article of The Creed p. 323

Meditation on John 3:16

P: We meditate on Jesus' great promise to us in John 3:16—*“For God so loved the world...”*

“The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.’” (Jeremiah 31:3)

C: “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

P: “But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 1:4,5)

C: “This is how God showed His love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.” (1 John 4:9)

P: *“That He gave...”*

“Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.’” (John 4:10)

C “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!” (Romans 5:15)

P: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)

C: “He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)

P: “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15)

C: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

P: *“His only begotten Son...”*

“Here is My servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on Him and He will proclaim justice to the nations.” (Matthew 12:18)

- C:** “to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.” (Ephesians 1:6)
- P:** “For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” (Colossians 1:13)
- C:** “**In the same way, Christ did not take on Himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to Him, ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’**” (Hebrews 5:5)
- P:** “*That whosoever believes in Him...*”
 “Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him and He will do this.” (Psalm 37:5)
- C:** “**It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans.**” (Psalm 118:8)
- P:** “Then Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’” (John 20:27)
- C:** “**But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**” (John 20:31)
- P:** “*Shall not perish...*”
 “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)
- C:** “**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**” (Romans 8:1)
- P:** “Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Romans 8:34)
- C:** “**Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.**” (John 8:11)
- P:** “*But has everlasting life.*”
 “Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.” (John 17:3)
- C:** “**Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.**” (Galatians 6:8)
- P:** “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.” (John 3:36)
- C:** “**No one who has left behind anything for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.**” (Luke 18:30)

Prayers

Lord’s Prayer

Closing Prayer

P: Almighty God, our Redeemer, in our weakness we have failed to be Your messengers of forgiveness and hope in the world. Renew us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may follow Your commands and proclaim Your rule of love, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “How Wide the Love of Christ” - Hymn #535

Postlude