

March 12, 2017

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.

I think the readings you heard today offer us some of the best insight we get into who God the Father really is. We hear of lengths God has gone to be in relationship with us and to show us his undying, un-relenting, unending love.

The first part begins all the way back at the beginning as God created the heavens and the earth and all that is within them. In the 26th verse of the first chapter of Genesis, God said; 'let us create humankind in our own image. So God created humankind in his image, male and female he created them. God blessed them. God saw everything God had made and indeed it was very good.' Ever since then God has desired to be in relationship with us his people. If you are coming to the Bible study this Lenten season, we are talking about the stories of the Old Testament. Especially in the stories from Genesis, they show how much God desired to be in relationship and the number of ways God reached out to humankind, but how often we turned away.

Finally in the 12th chapter of Genesis we get the first introduction to Abram and Sara, these two whom God chose to be the beginning of the chosen people of God. God did so by calling Abram to become a sojourner, an alien in the land God was promising to him. A reminder to each of us that we are aliens in a foreign land, not only because it was our direct ancestors who came to this land as foreigners seeking a new life, but as people of faith we are sojourners wondering in a foreign land as we continue our journey in this life.

Just as Abram was sent, so we are too are sent with the assurance that we are blessed to be a blessing to others. In that way others may be drawn to us and to our God so that the whole world might be blessed. That is the promise

March 12, 2017

given to Abram our ancestor and passed down through the ages to us as we continue on our journey in life.

We know the flawed journeys of our Biblical ancestors, of the family of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Jacob, of King David and all who followed. We know the liars and the cheaters, the murderers and the adulterers along with the faithful men and women. Yet God chose us, this fickle group of humans who will praise him and thank him one day; then turn around the next day cursing or ignoring him believing we are more capable of accomplishing our desires on our own. It was into this mix of faithful people and unruly hooligans that Jesus is born. Jesus the Son of God born of a woman enters into the human story so we might better come to know the love our God who created us, has for us.

As we explore the Gospel of John over the next few weeks the Gospel writer will take us in circles using images and symbols to make a point in the story. Throughout the Gospel Jesus speaks plainly to all the crowds and leaders and all who come to hear him, yet those who are listening do not seem to get it.

This encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus is no different. Here in the dark of night, a time when only the bad people would dare to venture out or those who did not want to be seen, Nicodemus comes to Jesus. It is here in the darkness Nicodemus proclaims the goodness of Jesus, saying we know only one who comes from God can do these signs which you are doing. The resulting dialog goes back and forth as Jesus speaks about heavenly things and spiritual matters; which does not connect in any way with the worldly view of his visitor. Nicodemus was a wise man in his day, yet he failed to pick up on any of the clues Jesus gave him.

March 12, 2017

Finally Jesus lays it out plainly telling him and us; *“If I told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascend into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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.”*

It is here early in the Gospel of John, where Jesus speaks of his final destination. Here we are told of his being lifted up on the cross so that all who believe might have eternal life. Here we get a clear indication of the mission and the journey Jesus is traveling. Then Jesus gives us the verse which has become central to many in their faith. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”* But for me just as important is the verse which follows; *“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.”*

Jesus came not only that we may not perish, but that we might not be condemned along the way. After all we are a part of that same fickle human family who has a love / hate relationship with our creator. In a very literal translation of these verses one might say “God so loved this ungrateful, selfish, sinful, God-hating world that he sent his Son to save it from destruction.”

Even greater is the fact God did this without asking us. God sent his Son out of his love for us and his desire to rebuild, reconnect and reestablish a relationship with us, and all of his creation.

A father and his young son were having a disagreement. It was time for his 6 year old son to go to bed and the son refused. The young child refused to go

March 12, 2017

to bed and the father refused to give in. Finally out of total frustration the young boy yelled at his father, 'I hate you.' The father replied, 'I am sorry you feel that way son, but I love you.'

To which the son replied. 'Daddy don't say that.' Surprised the father continued to say, 'it true, I love you.' Only to have the son reply, 'stop saying that Daddy. Stop saying that right now.' Finally the father came over and said, 'listen to me, I love you, like it or not.'

Even at 6 years old the son understood that in the face of unconditional love he was powerless. The father did not negotiate with saying, 'I will love you if you go to bed like a nice young boy.' Then it would have opened up their relationship to ongoing negotiations. But once the father refused to negotiate, refused to make the love for his son conditional upon the actions of the son, the son could do nothing else but accept his father's love or flee from it.

This is exactly what these two verses are all about. If God had made his love conditional upon our actions, upon our asking for God to love us, upon our righteous acts then we would have the power. Then we would be able to negotiate the terms of our relationship with God.

But because God just loves us, completely and unconditionally, that when God sent his Son to die for us; there is nothing we can do. Yes, we can still try to turn away, still try to run from God or reject him, but the fact remains; God loves us more than we can imagine.

So what does this mean for us how have been save by grace through the gift of faith, for us who are so totally surrounded by the unconditional love of God in Christ Jesus. There is nothing we can do but to respond in love and by sharing the Good News of his Son, Jesus Christ our Savior. To respond as

March 12, 2017

we live out our blessing by blessing others, to respond by caring for our fellow sojourners who journey with us as we live as resident aliens in this foreign and hostile world.

To respond as we go forth as messengers of Christ to tell others that they too are loved by God, like it or not, to respond by proclaiming to them that; *“God so loved the world, that God so loves you, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the whole world might be saved through him.”*

AMEN

T.G.B.T.G.

Pastor Michael

John 3:1-17

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.

'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.