

Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 10, 2024

QUESNEL

“Unpacking the Nutshell” (John 3:14-21)

“John 3:16”: You’ll see that reference

- just that reference, by itself,
 - no other words with it
 - you’ll see “John 3:16” showing up in all sorts of places.
- You might have seen a guy with a rainbow wig
 - at a sporting event,
 - holding up a sign that says on it, simply,
 - “John 3:16.”
- You might have seen quarterback Tim Tebow
 - with “John 3:16” written on his eye black.
 - They figure that just the reference is enough
 - to get their message across,
 - since the verse, John 3:16,
 - is so well known.

You all know it.

- You probably learned it by memory
 - when you were a kid.
 - Depending on the translation you learned,
 - it goes something like this:
 - “*For God so loved the world,*
 - *that He gave His only Son,*
 - *that whoever believes in Him*
 - *should not perish*
 - *but have eternal life.*”
- That’s John 3:16.
 - This verse is commonly called “the gospel in a nutshell,”
 - because it so well captures
 - and encapsulates the precious gospel
 - of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
- The gospel in a nutshell, John 3:16.
 - But there is so much packed into this one verse,
 - packed into that nutshell,

- that we do well to examine
 - and explore its contents.
- Otherwise, we may take it for granted
 - and miss some things that we are overlooking,
 - because the verse is so familiar to us.
- So today we will look at what is in John 3:16 right now.
 - We will call it “Unpacking the Nutshell.”

“For God so loved the world,

- *that he gave His only Son,*
 - *that whoever believes in Him should not perish*
 - *but have eternal life.”*
- We will take it a piece at a time.
 - We start with the word “God.”
 - Now this may seem obvious, but it is not.
- Who or what you mean by the word “God”
 - can and does vary from individual to individual,
 - from culture to culture,
 - from Christian denomination
 - to Christian denomination
 - and from religion to religion.
- When people say “God,”
 - they are not all on the same page,
 - particularly in a pluralistic society like ours
 - and that is a problem.
- Different people have different ideas about who God is
 - or what God is.
 - Is he—or she,
 - or gender neutral
 - as some of the denominations here in Canada
 - proudly proclaim
- or it—is “God” just some generic
 - “higher power”
 - as many of the old time lodges proclaimed?
 - How many gods are there?
 - Does each religion have its own god?
 - Are there as many gods as there are people,
 - since men have a tendency to create god
 - in their own image?
 - No, it is just the opposite.

- People may think that God
 - is whatever they imagine Him to be,
 - but that is definitely not the case.

There is only one true God,

- who created the heavens and the earth
 - and all men everywhere.
 - This is the God who is only revealed in the Bible.
 - He created the world,
 - and He called together a people for Himself,
 - the people of Israel in the Old Testament,
 - expanded now to the church of all nations
 - in the New Testament.
 - Many of our modern denominations
 - proudly declare that God is too paternalistic
 - and insist on describing Him as gender neutral
 - or even worse as only God
 - without the triune attribution.
 - God is who He is as He has revealed himself.
 - And there is no other.
 - We make a huge mistake
 - by not being careful in identifying
 - who our Lord and Saviour really is
 - before we pray,
 - worship
 - and offer sacrifices of thanksgiving to God.

We know on the basis of Holy Scripture that God,

- the only true God,
 - is the triune God,
 - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - To that we must remain true.
- Let me try to explain the problem in a potential family dinner.
 - I am going to pick on the family Thanksgiving dinner. You have invited the various family members to dinner and it is time for the prayer of thanks before the meal. Your 7 children with their spouses and your grandchildren are all there. Now, for a bit of family history. You are the head of the house, your wife and you have raised your children in the Lutheran church similar to what you now worship in. Your first child married a man of Japanese ancestry who has

always been a devotee of Shintoism and will not change. Your second daughter married a Lutheran pastor of extremely liberal bent. Your third child, also a daughter went into the work of the church as a deaconess. The next three children were the boys of the family. The first is married to a Jewish girl and he himself denies any faith in God, the second son has been married several times, each time trying to serve himself rather than the marriage, the third son is now living with a woman after his first wife ran off with another woman and again professes no faith. Finally the last child is a Lutheran School teacher. Quite a mess, huh? Now the wife of the head of the family wants to keep the peace on this day and had advocated to her husband that they ask one of their non believing sons to offer the prayer because they will do a better job of “keeping the peace” with a more general prayer. As you may have guessed by the rather specific knowledge I seem to have of this family, this is a real situation. The head of the house is my father’s oldest brother, a pastor. He resisted the temptation and pressure brought to bear to compromise in prayer. He prayed boldly and in the name of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To do otherwise would be an insult to God. Where is the integrity of one who would bend to such nonsense, where is their faith? Do you think they would be offering their prayers of thanksgiving upon the altar of peace? By no means, it is not even a neutral altar of nothingness. If it is not the altar of God, these type of prayers are a nod to the power of Satan.

- And in the context of John 3:16,
 - the term “God” here refers specifically to God the Father,
 - since later in the verse God’s Son is spoken of
 - as distinct from the Father.
- So here where the verse starts out,
 - “For God,”
 - We are talking about God the Father Almighty,
 - maker of heaven and earth,
 - the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“For God so loved the world.”

- Before we get to the word “love,”
 - we shall talk about the term “the world.”
 - When the Gospel of John says “the world,”
 - it is speaking of the world insofar
 - as it does not know its Creator.
- This is the world as it has gone its own way.
 - The people of this world seek to be independent of God,
 - to be their own god, really.

- And this does not work out too well.
 - We think we know better than our Creator
 - what is the best way for us to live.
- But we end up doing damage to one another,
 - hurting our fellow creatures in countless ways,
 - and bringing guilt on ourselves.
 - We shake our fist at God
 - and turn a deaf ear to His Word.
 - The Bible calls this “sin.”
 - It is stupid,
 - and it is deadly.
- “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*”
 - That is the state of the world we live in.

And you and I are part of it,

- according to our fallen sinful nature.
 - As St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians puts it:
 - “*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world.*”
- You and I have those sins to confess,
 - where we have hurt people and ignored God
 - and ignored what He says is the right way to live.
 - By nature we are right there
 - in that whole sinful mess called “the world.”
 - By nature we are children of wrath.

So what is God going to do to the world?

- What ought the verb to be in our verse?
 - “For God so condemned the world”?
 - “For God so hated the world”?
 - From our point of view and way of thinking
 - those verbs would be appropriate,
 - given how badly we have rebelled against our Creator.
- But in God’s way of thinking He says,
 - Surprisingly to us,
 - “For God so loved the world.”
- Now that is amazing.

- That God would love us,
 - after all we've done.
 - But that is the nature of God and
 - what John 3:16 tells us.
 - “For God so loved the world.”

Now here again I suppose we have to define our terms.

- For just as the word “God”
 - means many things to many people,
 - so also does the word “love.”
- To many in our society, “love”
 - has been reduced to just a warm,
 - fuzzy feeling.
 - “Let’s all hold hands and sing Kumbaya.”
 - No, that’s a bit too shallow
 - for the love that God does.
- “For God so loved the world.”
 - In the first place,
 - it means He does this
 - in spite of how the world
 - has rebelled against Him.
- Despite our actions and behaviour,
 - God loves us.
 - Furthermore, the love that God does
 - never stops at mere feelings.
 - God’s love results in action.
 - When God loves, He does something about it.
- It means that God has mercy on us.
 - He sees the mess we have made of this world,
 - and He is committed to doing something to fix it.
 - God wants the best for us.
 - His love is a steadfast,
 - faithful love,
 - by which He takes action to help us
 - at the point of our need.

So what has He done?

- Again, John 3:16 tells us:
 - “For God so loved the world that he gave.”

- This is God incarnate,
 - Jesus Christ.

And God “gave” His Son.

- His only Son.
 - The Son He loves, Jesus Christ.
 - “This is my beloved Son,” the Father says,
 - “with whom I am well pleased.”
- Nevertheless,
 - God gave Him, sacrificially.
 - Gave Him into suffering and death.
 - This is how much God loves us,
 - that He was willing to make this supreme sacrifice.
- Christ Jesus went to the cross,
 - to suffer and die,
 - precisely in order to do the will of His Father
 - who sent him and who loves us so much.

But why?

- What was the purpose of this giving,
 - of this suffering and dying?
 - John 3:16 tells us:
 - “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son,
 - that whoever believes in Him
 - should not perish
 - but have eternal life.”
- It was all for our benefit,
 - and there are two sides to this benefit.
 - It is what we get and what we do not get.
 - Because of God’s gift of His Son,
 - what we do not get under God’s Mercy
 - is the “perishing.”
- To perish is to die,
 - to die the big death,
 - to die under God’s judgment and condemnation.
 - To perish is to die with no hope.
 - It is to be lost forever.
 - But Christ died so that we would not perish.
 - God does not want us to perish,

- and therefore He has given His Son
 - so that we will not.

That is what we do not get.

- What we do get, and this is the Grace
 - what we receive, is life.
 - The big life, eternal life.
 - This is life that last forever.
 - But there is more to it
 - than just a matter of quantity.
- It is a new quality of life, too,
 - a new kind of life.
 - Life with God.
 - And you actually have entered
 - into this eternal life already.
 - You have it now.
 - The gift is yours.

How?

- How have you received this gift?
 - By faith.
 - “That whoever believes in him,” our verse says.
- The Holy Spirit has worked this faith,
 - this trust,
 - in your heart.
 - By faith,
 - faith worked by the Holy Spirit,
 - through the means of the gospel
 - now you trust in Jesus Christ
 - as your Saviour.

John 3:16,

- *“God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son,*
 - *that whoever believes in Him*
 - *should not perish but have eternal life.”*
- For It is called “the gospel in a nutshell,”
 - a condensed summary of the entire gospel
 - in just one verse.
 - Today we have unpacked the nutshell,

- very briefly.
 - But, praise God,
 - it will take us an eternity to enjoy the results.

AMEN

This sermon was prepared for the Divine Service at Trinity Lutheran Church, Quesnel, BC and was presented on March 10, 2024, the day we celebrated the 4th Sunday in Lent.. If you have questions or comments please feel free to call or text Pastor Alan Visser at (250) 552-4685.