

The Good News of John 3:17

February 17, 2008

(Lent 2 - Year A)

John 3: 1-17

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Today's reading from the Gospel of John is an occasion when both scripture and music flow together beautifully.

In the Gospel of John, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews, comes to Jesus.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night;
He is an inquiring soul.

Jesus and Nicodemus have a conversation about being born from above, about being born again.

Then, in John 3:16, Jesus says:

“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.”

This verse from Scripture, John 3:16, is one of the most famous verses in the Bible.

And these words from scripture have also been set to music, music that flows beautifully with the scripture text.

These words from John 3:16 and 3:17 have been set to music by John Stainer, in a song entitled: “God So Loved the World.”

The St. Alban's choir will sing this song during communion today.

I requested that the choir sing John Stainer's “God So Loved the World” today because, to me, these words from Scripture sum up my idea of what the Christian faith is all about.

I am reminded, when I hear this song, of the choir of King's College Chapel in Cambridge, England, singing this song in candlelight, as they do on their Christmas Eve radio broadcast.

In the deep darkness of an ancient and beautiful chapel, the choir sings softly:

“God so loved the world,
God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,

That who so believeth, believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

But then, the choir sings, with great force and crescendo:

{sung}

“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.

God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.

But that the world through him might be saved.”

Even though the good news of John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible,

The good news of John 3:16 is incomplete without John 3:17.

For in John 3:17, Jesus says:

“Indeed God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn.

Some people that I meet seem to think that being a good Christian involves the condemnation of sinners.

However, the good news of John 3:17 is that God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world.

Several years ago, when we lived in Virginia, a woman in our church came to me with a personal problem.

This woman, I think her name was Ann, was distraught over what to do with a situation in her family life, and she came to me to ask my opinion on what to do.

Ann told me that she had a grown daughter, who was in her mid-20s.

And Ann’s grown daughter had a boyfriend.

And her daughter and her boyfriend had decided to live together, without getting married.

Ann told me that she and her husband disapproved of this living arrangement, so they had decided that their daughter was no longer welcome in their home.

Because Ann’s daughter was living outside of wedlock, Ann had severed

her relationship with her daughter.

Ann told me:

“Jeff, I think that I should condemn the lifestyle that my daughter is leading.

I think I need to stand up for Christian principles and not condone sin.

Therefore, I have not allowed her into my home anymore, unless she stops living with her boyfriend, or gets married.”

Then, with a painful look in her eyes, she asked me:

“Jeff, do you think I am doing the right thing?”

I replied:

“Ann, this is my advice to you:

You should call up your adult daughter and say to her that you only intend to have this conversation with her once.

Then, tell her that you do not agree with or approve of her lifestyle,

But then you need to tell her that you love her -

And that you and your husband will welcome your daughter and her boyfriend back into your home, at any time.”

If God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,

Then what gives us the right to think that *we* are sent into the world to condemn the world?

I have heard some people in Christian circles say that we are supposed to “Love the sinner, but hate the sin.”

But I think that is a load of bull!

Because anytime I have heard that phrase -

That we are to “love the sinner, but hate the sin” -

It is usually just a thinly veiled comment that really covers up intolerance and bigotry and judgment and condemnation.

This intolerance and condemnation of others reminds me of a song by the Austin Lounge Lizards.

The title of that song is:

“Jesus Loves Me --- But He Can’t Stand You.”

The good news of John 3:16 *and* John 3:17 is that God so loves the

world.

This means that Jesus does not just love me,
That Jesus does not just love you,
This means that God so loves *everyone* on this big, blue marble that we
call the world.

For God did *not* send his Son into the world to condemn the world.

My experience with people is that most folks are already painfully aware
of what is wrong in their lives.

All you have to do is to watch the Oprah Winfrey show for one week,
and you know that there is plenty of bad stuff in the world.

People do not need more condemnation, more intolerance, more
judgment.

People need more love, more forgiveness and more salvation.

And the good news of Christianity is that God's people do not heap on
more condemnation, more intolerance, more judgment.

The good news of Christianity is that God's people heap on extra
toppings, of more love, more forgiveness and more salvation.

For, "indeed God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the
world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

So, my brothers and sisters, if God did not send his Son into the world to
condemn the world,

Then why should we?

{sung}

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.

God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world.

But that the world through him - and through us -

Might be loved.

AMEN.