

## Pastor Colleen's Sermon of June 7, 2009

**Grace, Peace and Mercy be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen**

**“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.”**

John 3: verses 16 and 17 are two of the most famous verses in Scripture.

Most people can quote these verses by heart

And our lectionary loves these verses.

As a matter of fact this is the third time in nine months that these particular verses have been part of the gospel for the day.

So the point is that they are pretty significant.

What is the most significant about these verses is the way they stress and emphasize the breadth and depth of God's love.

And since this is a never ending love it can often be difficult to conceptualize.

The writer Anne Lamott tells of a personal experience that helped her grasp the extent of God's love.

It seems that Anne lives on the West Coast,

and one day, many years ago, she was walking on the beach with her young son, Sam.

Not far off, they saw a man who was severely abusing his dog.

Anne's son immediately wanted his mother to intervene and do something,

but she, quite frankly, was frightened by the man's viciousness.

Eventually another woman on the beach yelled for the man to stop, but he just laughed at her and led the brutalized dog away.

After he was gone, Anne was feeling ashamed of what she saw as her own cowardice,

and as she and Sam continued down the beach, she found herself praying,

saying simply, “Please.”

She says she didn't even know what she was *asking* for,

but that thought about the word “ask” reeled up a memory from something that had happened in her church the week before.

It seems one of the members had told the congregation about how she and her husband had come to adopt their little son.

They had gone through an agency named ASK, which stands for Adopt Special Kids.

When they applied, they had to first fill out a questionnaire with questions like “Could you adopt an addicted baby? A child with a terminal illness? With mild retardation? With moderate retardation? With tendencies toward violence against others?”

As the woman recited this list, she began to cry.

At that point, the pastor stepped up beside her and said,

“God is an adoptive parent, too. And [God] chose us all. [God] says, ‘Sure, I'll take the kids who are addicted or terminal. I pick all the mentally challenged kids, and of course, the sadists. The

selfish ones, the liars, etc ....”

Recalling this now on the beach, it suddenly came to Anne that “The mystery of God’s love ... is that God loves the man who was being mean to his dog just as much as he loves babies ....  
So of course he loves ordinary old me,  
even or especially  
at my most scared and petty and mean and obsessive.  
God Loves me; *chooses* me.”

She wrote that it was a life altering moment for her.  
It was a moment where she really felt the overwhelming depth of God’s love.

What Anne realized on the beach that day is that God loves us even when we are a mess,  
Even when we are guilty of lousy behavior,  
Even when we are in emotional or spiritual disarray.

God loves us when we don’t seem to get anything right  
When we yell at our kids  
When we forget to say thank you  
Or when we decide to sleep in one Sunday instead of coming to church.

God loves us through our upheavals and our infightings  
through our out-casting and back-sliding,  
through our foot-stomping and side-stepping.  
God loves us when we are at our most unrecognizable  
**And God gave us his Son to save us from all that.**

And it’s all because of the way God really sees the world.  
God sees us not only as we are, but also as God calls us to be.

In our first reading for this morning we hear of the call of the prophet Isaiah  
When Isaiah sees the Lord sitting on his throne being attended to by the Seraphs  
Isaiah’s first reaction is to say,  
*“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips”*  
Instantly Isaiah professes his guilt and unworthiness  
And God sends a seraph to touch Isaiah’s lips with a hot coal and to cleanse him of his sin.  
And then the Lord asks who will answer his call to serve...

God did not see Isaiah as someone unworthy of God’s forgiveness, love and call...  
God saw Isaiah as a great a worthy prophet...  
And so he was...

When Nicodemus comes in the dark to ask Jesus a series of questions  
Jesus does not treat him as someone unworthy of answers  
Instead he challenges him to see God in a whole new way

Jesus offers him a chance to be changed and re-created.

All because God always sees us through the lens of love.

And that is one of the greatest pieces of Good news to come out of this morning's readings.  
That God is the one who claims us, forgives us and calls us.

Pastor Sharon said it last week...  
We are claimed, gifted and called.

All because God sees us not as we are but as we can be...

But if you're still having trouble grasping this idea of how much God loves you then hear John  
3:16 in a different way.  
Instead of hearing, For God so loved THE WORLD

Substitute your own name in place of the world.

So if you were saying it out loud you would hear your own name...

Or hear it like this:  
For God so loved YOU  
that he gave his only Son,  
so that if YOU believe in him,  
YOU may not perish  
but may have eternal life."

God's love is that Big...  
God's love is that deep  
God's love is that inclusive

God loves us and God doesn't easily let us go.  
That's why God sent his Son,  
and that's why God follows us through our unfaithfulness,  
our meanness to one other,  
our self-centeredness  
and our unholy messes.

For God so loved the world...  
For God so loved YOU

That is a great, deep love.  
And it can be so great that we have trouble really grasping it  
But all God asks is that we believe...  
And God will then do the rest.

Today is Trinity Sunday

It is the day in the church calendar where we usually talk about the Trinity  
And maybe in order to grasp what the trinity means  
we need to try and recover some sense of the enormity of the God whom we love and serve.  
Usually we work so hard to help people lose their fear of God  
that I wonder sometimes if we're in danger of losing sight  
of the awe and majesty Isaiah describes so wonderfully...

We may not see the Lord sitting on his throne...  
And we may not hear the Seraphs singing, Holy, Holy, Holy...  
But we have the greatest evidence of the majesty and holiness of God  
Staring us right in the face...  
We have the Cross...  
The place where God offered us God's greatest gift.  
The place where time is transformed;  
where hope is restored,  
and where death is destroyed forever.

All because God so loved the world...

Today I pray we can all be transformed by the enormity of this love.  
I pray that we will hear the Lord calling to us all  
And I pray that we will answer that call with the same, "Here I am Lord,"  
that Isaiah uttered all those centuries ago.

God so loved YOU that God sent his only Son so that if YOU believe YOU will have eternal  
life...

How will you respond?  
Amen

**May the peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your  
minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen**