

Sermon – March 14, 2021 – Lent 4

“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. ¹⁷“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...But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God

This morning I am going to talk to you about being saved and eternal life.

Many years ago, when we first got our television, I remember the ending to a religious show...was it Cardinal Fulton Sheen who would stand and talk to us, decked out in his regalia? Then the ending was always the same. A man’s voice came on and would proclaim:

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.

Anyone remember that? Maybe you’re not old enough!

God sent his Son in order that the world might be saved through him. These words are probably very familiar to us...have we heard them many times? Martin Luther called them the miniature gospel. For God **so** loved the world that he gave us his son so we could have eternal life.

God did not send the Son to **condemn** the world, but to save the world.

I suspect that the word ‘saved’ brings an inner reaction for many of us. Were you ever asked the question ‘Have you been ‘saved’?’ and felt uncomfortable? Maybe even inadequate...because you could not pin-point a definite moment when you realized you had been saved’...Being saved may conjure up revival meetings in tents and altar calls. We’ve probably all been startled by the sign that declares from a tree or a barn that ‘JESUS SAVES!’ or we’ve seen the T-shirt or bumper sticker with the same slogan...and felt uncomfortable.

I would like to share this story with you. It is the experience of a Jesuit priest called John Kavanaugh who taught at St. Louis University, Missouri.

One day he was reminded how easily we misunderstand and are misunderstood in matters of belief. While teaching a seminar on Sigmund Freud, he was confronted by a Christian fundamentalist student after class. The student said

"I think you Catholic priests were misled in your training."

The priest's hunch was that the student was upset by his reading of Freud. He defended himself: "We can all learn a lot from nonbelievers. "

"I don't mean Freud," the student said. "It's your seminary training that has led you away from the truth."

The priest didn't know what prompted him next to say what he did, but with a tone of resignation he sighed: "I can't remember much of what I learned in four years of theology, but not much of my faith rides on it. All I know is that my life would be meaningless if Christ has not saved us."

The student's jaw dropped. "You actually believe that Christ has saved you?"

"Of course. Otherwise, I'd have no hope."

"But you Catholics believe that priests and rituals save you."

"No, those things are great, but they're a waste of time if Christ hasn't saved us."

The student couldn't believe it. He expected the priest to be embarrassed by the "Jesus Saves" sign. It was no longer an embarrassment. It was his hope. It is our hope. No need for us to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, it is good news that Jesus saves us.

'Jesus Saves' **is my** hope. My hope and your hope is that we are saved by what happened on the cross. Our hope is that what happened on the cross continues to save us and to bring us home to our Father, just like the prodigal son. This is good news isn't it? We are given a free gift.

And that brings us to – 'eternal life'. As believers, we are saved so we may have 'eternal life'. But what is eternal life? I used to think of eternal life as something that happened after death.

"Eternal life," is a major theme in the Gospel of John. "Eternal life" occurs 17 times - almost half the New Testament occurrences. And yet its meaning is difficult to grasp.

Do you think of eternal life as life without end, something that happens after we die? It does have that sense. But the main meaning is **life lived in the presence of God.**

The night before his death, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says:

“And this **is** eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

So eternal life is knowing God now...it is the gift of living in God's presence...living as we were intended to live. Eternal life is life in Christ's light. “Those who do what is true live in the light.” We are saved from the darkness so that we can live in Christ's light.

Would you believe me if I said that band aids can help us understand eternal life? Recently I had a little cut on my thumb, so I put on a band aid. Before bed time, I took the band aid off. I was surprised at the sight. In just a few hours the skin, without light, had turned white. It looked withered and dead. I looked at the white shriveled skin and thought ‘that is what we're like when we live without the light of Christ. We lose our colour. We lose our vibrancy and sparkle. WE live diminished lives.

But There was and is a problem in this world; otherwise God, would not have had to send his Son Jesus. The problem is the darkness...the problem is evil in the world and our part in it...we are drawn to the darkness away from the light of Christ ...we call this sin and it's a thorny problem. We don't like to talk or think about it too much. We live in a culture that supports ‘doing what's right for you’. Sometimes it seems that so long as you're doing what's ‘right for you’ and I'm doing ‘what's right for me’, nothing is wrong...but some things *are* wrong. They're wrong because they separate us from God and God's good purposes for this world. They're wrong because they hurt people. We know that some things are dishonest, unkind, and some are unjust. There are big evils out there... terrorism, innocent people dying? Disproportionate distribution of wealth. We have so much and so many others have so little. Racism is still very much alive.

But the darkness is not all out there. If we're honest, we admit our own darkness, our own secret sins, our unhealthy relationships, our addictions, our selfishness ...that's why we confess our sins every time we worship and are given absolution.

God so loved the world...that's you and me...God so loved you and me that he sent his only son, that whoever believed would have eternal life.

To live that life in Christ that has the special quality about it, we need to return again and again to the great light. If we are to be that little candle, shining in the world of darkness...then we need to return again and again to the source of our light...sometimes to be re-lit if our light as blown out...but always returning to the light that saves us.

We are special, so special in our Lord's eyes...let us accept the great gift of eternal life which is life in Christ...promised to all who believe. We don't deny the darkness, in the world and in ourselves...but we are not overwhelmed by it because God has sent us Jesus, the risen Christ...a great light which saves us. Amen.