

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



MARCH 10, 2024

EVANGELISM

more than Bible verses

by Drew Downs

There's an irony in the most famous verse of scripture being associated with signs at baseball games and written on an athlete's eyepack. It is lousy evangelism.

Perhaps it gets people to look up the verse, which speaks of God's love. But *it* doesn't speak of love. It is a dude holding a sign or playing a game—ironically, one commonly compared to the kind of gladiator combat that martyred Christians.

When we proclaim the love of God, we do so as lovers. As teachers who love their subject. We can't throw out a Bible verse and expect people to follow the breadcrumbs—because we, too, are breadcrumbs.

Sending people to a passage about love through sacrifice isn't nearly as effective as actually showing them. Or walking with them on the journey. Being with each other, sharing God's love—that feels loving.

LENT

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Love

This week's gospel includes one of the most famous lines in modern Christianity:

"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."

It is also one of the most divisive, as its popularity rests on some difficult bits of theological conviction. It speaks to love and sacrifice. But is often pressed through a vision of individual gain and future reward.

This week, I'm writing a lot about love. And finding that I can't *only* speak to what it is, but also address what it is not. I wish I didn't have to. But love as a weapon can produce some mighty deep scars.

I think we do struggle to know how to love when the loving thing doesn't feel right. When it isn't good for them. Or it might feel wrong to us. I think we want to put love into a permanent box so we can always deploy it clearly and cleanly. I don't think it works that way.

Maybe love doesn't have to be the catch all. And maybe 99% of the time we really just need to make sure love actually feels like love. And let the exceptions prove the rule, not define it.

With love,
Drew

LENT

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FOR SUNDAY

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 10, 2024

Collect

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 3:14-21

Jesus said, "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. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 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."

LENT

Reflection

God is love.

Knowing that love is the very substance of God changes the way we see it. Love ceases to be simply an emotion. It isn't only a feeling. It becomes a vehicle of faith and a manifestation of God in our midst.

So why then do we wage war? Murder or abuse? The easy answer, of course, is that this is not of God. But the more difficult part is how we do this in the name of God.

The discovery of widespread abuse of indigenous persons in the United States and Canada into the 20th Century through Christian schools—stealing of children under the guise of saving them—shows the dark side of acts we claim are loving. This isn't just a problem for Roman Catholics or Evangelicals. Anglicans and Episcopalians, too.

There's a twist at the heart of the conviction that God loved the world through Jesus that may lead us to see love askew. That we make our goal to evangelize and make others like us. A kind of Borg-like assimilation for the Almighty. Or to defend God's honor to our own deaths.

These are such cynical and disappointing ways of seeing God's dream for creation. And they don't pass the sniff test. The one Presiding Bishop Curry always reminds us to use.

Does it look like love? *If it's not of love, it's not of God.*

In this passage, Jesus is speaking to a religious leader who knows Jesus must be of God. Seeing love in the world is about God—not our own greatness.

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