

**Pastor Jonna Bohigian**                      **March 8, 2020**  
**God So Loved the World**  
John 3:1 – 17

There are some texts that seem so simple, that there is no point in preaching them. There is nothing complicated and nothing new to be said because they are so simple. We are tempted to preach something *more* difficult, *more* thought-provoking, *more* profound, *less* known. And perhaps it's precisely *because* we have the inclination to move beyond these simple verses, that we ought to pause.

We live in the Silicon Valley, with one of the most educated and wealthiest populations in the *world*.<sup>1</sup> We are the home of high tech and a corresponding lightning-paced lifestyle. We are surrounded by fledgling start-ups and billion-dollar successes. We do as much as we can to survive this dog-eat-dog culture, and hope that we won't be marginalized into obsolescence.

It therefore goes against our culture to be simple. But God is not a God of our culture. He doesn't fit into our cultural paradigms. He is frustratingly simple and His ways seem like foolishness (1 Cor 1:18).

In John chapter 3, we encounter a man that many of us have met before. In John, his name is "Nicodemus," but we may know him as "Bill," "Sharon," or he may even be us. He is in a position of leadership, a well-studied and respected man. He has noticed that there is something different about Jesus, and he desires to understand him. He is a *religious* man, and he believes that understanding Jesus shouldn't be too difficult. He can appeal to Jesus' ego and invite Jesus to reveal who he is.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/enduring-faithfulness-in-the-san-francisco-bay-area/>

In our day, there are *lots* of different ideas about Jesus. Jesus was a good man; he was a prophet; he died on a cross, but his disciples stole his body; he was married; he was a moral teacher. The list is endless, and the various articles from a Google search can bring even *greater* confusion.

We aren't satisfied with our own experience; we aren't satisfied with what others say about him; we aren't satisfied with our ideas about him. And so, like Nicodemus, we go to the Source. We search where Jesus has chosen to reveal himself. Nicodemus had the privilege of going to Jesus in-the-flesh. We have the privilege of going to Jesus in the greatest way he has chosen to reveal himself to us, through Scripture.

And so, we begin our exploration with Nicodemus. I invite you to open your Bibles to John chapter 3 and follow along. Nicodemus clearly believes that Jesus is someone special. He has done signs, *miracles*, that many people have seen, so he *must* be a teacher from God.

Nicodemus is a well-educated man. He is a highly *religious* man. It's impossible to know what Nicodemus is *expecting* Jesus to say, but it seems logical that Jesus *could* commended him for identifying him as a teacher from God.

But in verse 3, Jesus doesn't accept Nicodemus' flattery, nor does he say that he's got it all wrong. Jesus seems to change the subject. He says instead, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3).

Jesus tells him that he needs to be born *again*. He can't simply *believe* one more thing or *do* one more thing. Something must *be* done to his entire *being*; he must *be born again*.

Nicodemus pushes back. That's not something that *anyone* can do. *No one* can crawl back into his mother's womb and be born again.

Jesus continues, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn 3:5 – 6). Jesus says that there is nothing *anyone* can *do* to enter the kingdom of God. No one can be good enough, kind enough, learned enough, believe enough, or care enough, to enter the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is not for the progressed or the elite. The kingdom of God is for those who are humbly re-born through the waters of baptism.

In baptism, we claim that we have no goodness in ourselves and that our egos, our "old selves," *need* to be put to death. In baptism, we acknowledge that we are broken, sinful, and in desperate need of a Savior. We acknowledge that we *cannot* save ourselves – even the good that we want to do, we don't do, but the evil that we don't want to do, we keep on doing (Rom 7:19). We acknowledge that we are caught in a desperate cycle of self-centeredness and broken relationships. We humbly submit to Jesus as the Lord of our lives, and we receive the Holy Spirit through the water and the word in baptism. We are born again.

We accept baptism as a gift from God, an act of His grace toward *us*. There is nothing we can do to be worthy of baptism; it is God's grace on you. And this is the primary reason we encourage *infant* baptism at St. Tim's. There is nothing anyone can do to be worthy of baptism; it is God's grace extended to each one of us. There is nothing you can do to make God love us more, and there is nothing you can do to make God love you less. God *loves* you, and in baptism, God *chooses* you.

As Jesus says in verse 5, a person enters the kingdom of God through water and the Spirit. It is tempting to think that this is *simply* a future promise. You get baptized and one day when you die, your soul goes to heaven. But, as Pastor Jim shared two weeks ago, Scripture does *not* say that our hope is to one day shed our bodies and to be spirits that live in heaven. No, Scripture speaks of heaven coming *down*. In a way in which we can't quite imagine, one day, heaven will perfectly and completely come down to earth, and it will be a "new earth." We will have new spiritual bodies, which will no longer suffer or struggle with sin. One day, life will be perfect.

It is often difficult to believe that there is hope. We get frustrated that we just can't seem to be who we want to be, that our bodies don't cooperate like they ought, that divisions between people grow wider, and that there is no way to reverse the effects of pollution on the earth. It is easy to give up hope and to live in fear.

But church, there *is* hope. There is hope because of what God has done for us in Jesus. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did *not* send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (Jn 3:16 - 17).

Out of His great love for all that He created, God *gave*. He gave the greatest gift, His one and only Son. He gave His Son in the humble form of human flesh, to the world they created, and the world did not know Jesus or accept him. He came, announcing that the kingdom of heaven had come! The kingdom of heaven had

come to earth in the Person of Jesus! It was time to turn and believe this good news (Mk 1:15).

Those who had eyes to see and ears to hear, believed that Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven to earth through every act, every word, every silence, every *part* of Jesus. The blind saw, the deaf heard, the lame walked, the sinful forgiven, the poor elevated, the oppressed set free.

The kingdom of heaven had come down, but the world hated him, because it loved darkness. Jesus came to bring *life* and *light*, but the world desired death and darkness, and put Jesus to death.

But the very tool of earthly destruction and shame would be used for the healing of all who believe. As Jesus said in verse 14, “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” (Jn 3:14 – 15). Jesus says that the Son of Man must be lifted up, and it sounds glorious, but Jesus is talking about the cross. Jesus had to be lifted up on a cross so that we might have *life*. Jesus had to die so that we might have a *future* life and a *present* life. As Jesus brought the kingdom of heaven to those he encountered, so he brings life to us *now*; we don’t have to wait. As my grandpa liked to shout in the pulpit, “The kingdom of heaven is now! The kingdom of heaven is *now!*” We have *life* because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

This is *good news*, so what’s the problem? For some, the problem is that they simply don’t believe. They don’t believe that Jesus’ death could bring life. If this is you, I want to encourage you to continuing seeking, continue exploring. Visiting Alpha might be something to consider. There are many in this congregation who

would be honored to speak with you about where you are in your journey, and would do so without judgment. There are many at St. Tim's who understand that each person is at a different place on their journey, and it is only the Holy Spirit who can bring change and newness of life.

For others, the problem is not belief that Jesus' death brings life, but that Jesus' death, God's love, is for them. For those who have grown up in the church, this is perhaps wherein the problem most likely lies. As children, you sang, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." You have memorized John 3:16 and know that God sent Jesus to die because of His love for the *world*, but these words never really sank deeply into you. They never seemed to apply to *you*. Perhaps you heard the words, but you did not see evidence of God's love for you.

Someone once told me that they wished that they did not need to see evidence of God's love for them through others; they wished they could simply believe it. But that was not how God created us. God created us with skin and bones, created to be in perfect relationship with God and with others. God created us to know His love for us *in time* and in the flesh.

Not long ago, my husband crawled into bed and looked me in the eye. He said, "I have something to say, and I think that it is something that God wants me to say to you. God wants me to tell you that He loves you. I think that is why He sent me to be your husband. God wants you to know that He loves you."

Jesus came in the flesh to demonstrate God's love for you, and throughout your life, God will send people in the flesh to tell you that He loves you. God loves you and He sent Jesus to earth to die for *you*.

1 O the deep, deep love of Jesus!  
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free,  
rolling as a mighty ocean  
in its fullness over me.  
Underneath me, all around me,  
is the current of thy love;  
leading onward, leading homeward,  
to thy glorious rest above.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/o the deep deep love of jesus](https://hymnary.org/text/o-the-deep-deep-love-of-jesus)