

November 30, 2014
First Sunday in Advent

God So Loved the World!

John 3:16

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It's About God's Love in Christ. This is our overall theme for these Sundays in Advent. Like looking at the facets of one diamond, we will be looking at the facets of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." On this first Sunday in Advent, we focus on the words **God So Loved The World!**

You wouldn't think that the word "God" would need much emphasizing. But, if you were to ask people what the Christmas season is all about spiritually, you would probably hear very little about God. You would hear people talk about love, joy, and peace. "It's about loving one another. It's about caring for the needy. It's about peace on earth. It's about goodwill among people." And we haven't even come to presents and cookies and family time and so forth.

Now, there is nothing wrong with the list, especially the cookies. But you will note that the list can be rather self focused. The list is more of an expectation of good things during the Christmas season. It's about the good that *we* do and what *we* want. There is little thought about God and our relationship with him, or lack thereof, in the list. Perhaps part of the problem with thinking about God is that in order to get to the concept of peace there has to be an understanding of hostility. In order to pursue joy, there comes with it an understanding of misery. And finding love means that you are looking for something that is missing, which leads to the concept of lovelessness. If Christmas is caring about those in need, you have to look at their poverty. If it is about goodwill among people, it confronts the ill will everywhere around us. The Perfect God shows us the reality of imperfection and accountability.

So, attach our list to the reality of God, and all of the sudden our lofty notions about the Christmas season and the hopes of merriment can quickly become derailed. This happens to a lot of people in life. Why do bad things happen? Though the ages, human beings have sought to reconcile their understanding of an all-powerful, loving God with the seemingly endless suffering around them. One prominent example of this struggle is the media mogul Ted Turner. Having lost his faith after his sister died of a painful disease, Turner said, "I was taught that God was love and God was powerful, and I couldn't understand how someone so innocent should be made or allowed to suffer so." Our theme: **God So Loved The Word!?** Not in Ted Turner's mind.

In an article titled, "Why does God's Creation Include Death and Suffering?" Dr. Tommy Mitchell [associated with Answers in Genesis] writes:

Each day brings new tragedy. A small child is diagnosed with leukemia and undergoes extensive medical treatment only to die in his mother's arms. A newlywed couple is killed by a drunk driver as they leave for their honeymoon. A faithful missionary family is attacked and killed by the very people they were ministering to. Thousands are killed in a terrorist attack. Hundreds drown in a tsunami, while scores of others are buried in an earthquake. How are these things possible if God really loves and cares for us? Is He a God of suffering? Man's usual response to tragedy is to blame God . . .

And that really puts it into perspective. We often leave God out of the equation because we blame him for all the suffering and death. Unfortunately, we fail to consider the whole picture.

First of all, God made his creation to be “very good” in every way. In the beginning, God gave to mankind everything that was good. In all the good that God gave, we were supposed to come to an understanding of the distinction between us and God and embrace a proper fear of him. We were to understand that apart from him we are nothing and have nothing, but in him - and him alone - is goodness and everything good. Either mankind could acknowledge and live this by listening to God and eating from one tree and avoiding another, or he could chose to rebel and separate himself from the goodness of God and die. God does not force mankind to be with him. Secondly, suffering and death came because Adam became consumed with his own desires. We would have done the same, and in God’s view, we have. Having become consumed by our sinful desires, we wreak havoc on the creation and have brought suffering and death into this world.

We have no room to blame God. We have become self-absorbed, and by embracing ourselves we have become disconnected from the goodness of God, alone, and subject to suffering and death. Dr. Mitchell observes:

Sadly, the consequences for our sin are much worse than life in a cursed universe. In addition to living our lives in a sin-filled creation, we must all die physically and then face a punishment much more horrible than anything we have ever known: the second death. The Apostle John tells of a lake of fire called the “second death” that awaits all those whose names are not written in the book of life (Revelation 20:14–15). This second death is the final punishment for our sin.

God So Loved The World! The Love of God is a very wonderful thing when we see it for what it is - touching a lost, ruined, guilty world - undeserved love. I do not agree with all his preaching, but in a sermon on our Gospel lesson for this morning, Charles Spurgeon once said:

What was there in the world that God should love it? There was nothing lovable in it. No fragrant flower grew in that arid desert. Enmity to him, hatred to his truth, disregard of his law, rebellion against his commandments; those were the thorns and briars which covered the waste land; but no desirable thing blossomed there. Yet, “God loved the world,” says the text; “so” loved it, that even the writer of the book of John could not tell us how much; but so greatly, so divinely, did he love it that he gave his Son, his only Son, to redeem the world from perishing, and to gather out of it a people to his praise.

What kind of love is this that God would love the unloving? This love, joy, and peace certainly doesn’t come from us. God’s love springs from himself. Think about it . . . God was extremely loving and good to us from the start, and despite the fact that we said “no!” God shows us again how loving and good he is by sending his Son to die for us while we were still sinners - even in the midst of the suffering and death of our own making. Only God’s love and goodness is real. The message of Scripture is that you and

I are not the source of love and goodness. Our comfort and confidence in life and death is that God forgives us because of Jesus Christ.

It is significant that Jesus says **God So Loved The World**. The world is the enemy of God. It is the world that will not recognize and receive him. The world is us . . . me. **God So Loved The World**. What a tremendous comfort that is! Christ suffered and gave his life that our suffering and death might be taken away. Even though the holy, righteous God of the universe, the Creator of all things, the judge of all eternity should be utterly revolted by us and has every right to condemn and punish us he doesn't because the blame has fallen on the blameless Jesus! How can we ever blame God? We can't!

God is not like us. God is love. God is good. In the words of Dr. Mitchell, "Even though we rebelled against Him and brought punishment on ourselves, God loves His children and does not want them to spend eternity in hell. Our merciful Creator has provided a way to be reconciled to Him and to escape the terrible eternal punishment for our sin. This way of escape is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." **God So Loved The World**. When we consider the baby born in Bethlehem during this Christmas season, and we consider love, joy, and peace, may we never forget that he came to be born in us, in our failure and rebellion and weakness. Love, joy, and peace is from God.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott