



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Watertown, WI

“God’s Amazing Love”

John 3:16

Rev. David K. Groth

*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."*

Third Sunday in Lent
March 3, 2013

Collect of the Day

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

When you were born, you came with no money. No skills. No words of wisdom. You came into the world empty handed. You came into the world utterly helpless and in need of everything. Warm milk, clothing, shelter, cleansing. Some of you came colicky, crying day and night and there was nothing your parents could do to quiet you.

From your parents' perspective, what was there to love? But they did. The love of a parent is an irrational but mighty force. From the moment you were born, or the moment you were adopted, that irrational love of your parents was already there. They would have fought tooth, claw and nail to protect you, and if someone had come up to your dad and said, "Mister, that is one ugly baby you got there", even the most passive of fathers would be hot with anger.

Jesus once asked if we humans, who are sinful, have such a love for our children, how much more does God, (the sinless and selfless Father of us all), how much more does he love us? We are his children and he sees we are dependent on him for everything. And just like a parent willingly takes care of an infant, so he cares for us. He does not forget us. In Isaiah chapter 49, the Lord asks, "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will never forget you" (v. 15).

But what happens when the child forgets the Lord? What happens when the child rebels?

Did any of you ever rebel against your parents as teenagers? Of course you did. We all did. It's a difficult time of life; no one gets out of it unscathed. In adolescence your hormones are surging, your soul is in ferment, your skin betrays you and you feel like a walking pimple. The opposite sex may ignore you, even tease you. Family can feel like a tight collar around your neck. We rebel. We think we don't need our parents any more . . . at least not their rules.

According to the Bible, the same happens with our relationship with God, our heavenly Father. We spurn his love. We ignore his rules. We wander away from our Good Shepherd. Again from Isaiah, "All we like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." Romans 5 says when we sin we become God's enemies (v. 10). We turn against God our heavenly Father. Those are strong words, but let's think about it for a moment.

Have you ever done something knowing God would not want you to do it? Have you ever been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm to God's good creation or to other people? If so, the Bible teaches you have taken on the role of an enemy, an enemy of God. Romans 8:7 says "The sinful mind is hostile to God" . . . makes us enemies of God.

Now, those are strong words and some would disagree with them. "I'm not so bad" they think. They look around and compare themselves to others, and say "In fact, I'm a pretty decent person. I'm not perfect, but I do my best and am better than many others."

You know, if a pig could talk (and I'm glad it can't), but if a pig could talk he might say the same thing. He might look at his fellow pigs and say, "I'm pretty clean compared to those swine over there." But by human standards, all the pigs are filthy. They're all in the same muddy pen. They all need help.

It works the same way with us. We may think of ourselves as less sinful than others, but compared to God, by God's standards, we are all filthy with sin. We all need help. God has never sinned. And you and I have never *not* sinned.

C.S. Lewis said we sin in between bites of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. That is, it happens so casually, and most of the time we are completely unaware that we just blew through another commandment of God.

Just for fun, let's do the math. Let's say you lived a life in which you broke God's commandments just once an hour. I don't know about you, but I would be thrilled with that score. They'd probably name a bridge after me something. But, just for the sake of argument, let's say that in thought, word and deed, you only had one sin per hour of your life. An average life span of 72 years would mean about 631,000 times you broke God's law. Picture a report on your life, sort of like a police report, with 631,000 infractions listed on it. Picture a printer spitting out this report, page after page after page. (Someone will have to change the ink cartridge a couple of times and break out another ream of paper.) Now, picture standing before holy and almighty God as he thumbs through this report. If he were to look up and ask, "What do you have to say for yourself?" what would you say? How would you respond? Would you really say, "You know, I'm not so bad. In fact I'm a pretty decent person, better, at least, than a lot of others." Do you really think that would work with God? I don't think so either.

We have a problem. We are sinners, unholy, impure, unclean, and Revelation 21 says "nothing that is unholy will ever enter in heaven, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false." Again, I don't know about you, but that means I'm out. I don't qualify. . . unless God somehow takes that sin away, unless somehow he cleanses me of it.

As children, when we were at our most

rebellious, our parents were probably not very happy with us. They got angry and punished us. But did they still love us? Of course they did. They didn't always like us or respect the choices we were making, but they still loved us. Again, parental love is an irrational and mighty force.

So it is with God's love for us all. We go our own way rather than God's. We do what we want, no matter what God says. We make choices that are offensive to God. But as our heavenly Father, God still loves us, and wants to save us from our own decisions.

Our text says, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Though we have rebelled against our heavenly Father, yet he still loves us and sent his Son Jesus to die for us on a cross for the forgiveness of our sins. 2 Corinthians 5 says that on the cross, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (v. 19). Jesus never sinned, but God the Father put on Jesus our sins and punished Jesus for them (2 Corinthians 5:21). He did that because he loved us.

God the Father gave us his Son. Would you do that? Would you offer the life of your child for someone else? I wouldn't. There are those for whom I would give my life. But ask me to make a list of those for whom I would give my son's life, and the sheet would be blank. There would be no name on that list.

But God's list contains your name and mine and the name of every person who ever lived, such is the scope of God's love. No exclusions. No exceptions. "God so loved the *world* that he gave his Son."

Aren't you glad the verse does not say, "For God so loved those who are always good, that he gave his Son." Nor does it say, "For God so loved the Europeans or the Americans or the sober ones or the smart ones. . ." No, it says, "God so loved the world that he gave his Son." Because you are part of the world, you are also an object of God's amazing love. There is no living person on this planet whom God does not love in Jesus Christ.

Universities can be exclusive places if you are not

smart enough or productive enough. Athletic teams can be exclusive if you're not big, fast and strong. Musical groups can be exclusive, even places of work can be exclusive. These all may exclude you, but Jesus includes you as an object of his love. No matter who you are or what you've done, he loves you, and that is what makes his love amazing.

“God’s Amazing Love.” That word “amazing” is used way too much, isn’t it? Comedian Jimmy Kimmel counted how many times the word “amazing” was used during Sunday evening’s broadcast of the Oscars. 101 times! He made a video montage out of it. “You look amazing in those shoes.” “That’s an amazing necklace.” “It’s so amazing to be here among all these amazing people” for 101 times.

The word amazing has lost some of its punch because it is overused. But God’s love for us in Jesus is truly amazing. It is an extravagant love, an extravagant grace. It is the irrational and mighty force of a parent who will do anything and pay any price to protect and care for and save his children. Amen.

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