

The Love of God

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...

The passage that struck me as interesting this morning is one that we all know well... it's found in John 3:16 – where it begins with the words, *“For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life...”*

in Romans 8:37 it says, *“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us...”*

and in 1 John 3:1 it says, *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are”...*

“For God so loved the world”...

So let me begin with a question – in light of all that is going on in your life (and around the world) where do you see God's love most clearly?...

This was a question a woman was wrestling with years ago... a woman some of us once knew here at Faith (and I ministered to in my early days)... now she wasn't necessarily a deep-thinker or a theologian – but she was a very intelligent woman who had a life that she loved - cut short by a terminal illness...

As I sat by her bedside in Ocean County Community Hospital, she would ask me the same questions week after week, *“Why is God letting this happen?... what did I do to deserve such pain and suffering?”*... in other words, it was in her time of suffering (where she struggled to see the love of God)...

To be honest with you - I've also asked myself the same question from time to time; *“where was God when my father died tragically?”*... or *“where was God when our first child was miscarried?”*... *where was God when the town of Lavallette was under water during Sandy?*... and even to this day – I can still remember the struggle I had in being able to recognize the love of God (during those difficult times in my own life)... and yes, we all want to believe in the love of God (but the truth is – that's not so easy to do) when we find ourselves suffering

Some of you may also recognize the name Rabbi Harold Kushner... he wrote many books and has given many lectures around the world – all inspired by his son Aaron – who died from the premature aging disease progeria...

and in his work (with many references to the book of Job) he wrestles with God's love in light of human suffering – and he asks the question, "*Why does God let bad things happen to good people?*"... a question we've all asked ourselves at one point or another – and have most likely - failed to answer...

Now I'd like to tell you this morning that I know the answer... that I've solved an age old question that has haunted the greatest minds and thinkers since the beginning of time, or that God spoke to me in a vision and made all things clear, or that I can even make sense of your own trials and tribulations today...

But the truth is – I can't (in fact, no one can)...

But that doesn't mean that I don't have my own questions...and the question that I wrestle with today is not '*why does God let bad things happen to me*'... but my question is more complex... my question is, "*but why does God let so many good things happen?*"...

and I say that, because like you I've made mistakes – I've disappointed God – failed the people around me from time to time – and so often I struggle to believe that God will see me through the difficult times... and I share that because, as you know, there's no such thing as perfect faith...

And yet, again and again – even with the worst things that I have encountered in life – God's love always seems to emerge in time... and so often I see this love when I find myself being forgiven – or finding what I need (at exactly the right time) – or receiving grace (when I don't expect it)... or simply being reminded of it (when we read it in God's Word)....

Now I know that we have all been through hell in the last year (and I think that if you wanted to you could easily find some reason to complain – or point out that life isn't fair – and perhaps even believe that God doesn't love you)... in fact, that's a common belief today... that there's no such thing as a loving and forgiving God...

But if there's always another way of looking at things (one being through the lens of our faith) – then when was the last time that you counted your blessings?... and when was the last time that you thanked God for what you do have?... or simply took the time to see what is good – and amazing – and a gift in your life right now?... (and I ask that not to minimize your pain or your struggle but to keep your eyes on God's love – so that you're not swept away (like those who live their lives without faith)....

Well, someone is going to say to me later today, “*Yeah, but pastor if you had to live my life you wouldn't be saying that!*”...

and you know what? – I'm not living your life – but what I can honestly tell you is that I've had my own share of 'ups and downs' (and even now I can give you a long laundry list of things you wouldn't want to go through either - if you were me)...

but I learned long ago – that the one thing I don't want to ever become – is a victim (no matter my circumstances)... and sure - I can feel sorry for myself and fight with God every time something doesn't go the way I had hoped... I can sit around and ask the question, “why is all of this happening to me?”...

but there's something someone said to me recently that I think is another fair question... and instead of wondering 'why me?' – I can also ask myself 'why not me?'... am I such a good person that God owes me something?...

of course, not – and either are you - because in the end the only thing we can all agree upon – is that life is a gift... and we don't get to control it, or own it, or even keep it forever... life is only a gift – but what you do with the gift (and what you do with God's love) is up to you...

“*For God so loved the world*”, it tells us in John 3:16 – and whether or not you choose to believe it (is up to you)... but if you do (the Bible tells us that we will have *all that we need*)...

Let me close with the story of a little boy who had every reason in the world to complain... he was left orphaned in the streets of Brazil and had to beg for every meal... at night he was cold, alone, and scared of what might happen to him on a regular basis...

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and one night while looking for food he met a policeman and asked if he knew of any place where he could find some food... and so the officer told him where to go, to knock on the door, and when they answered he was to say, "John 3:16"...

and so off the boy went – he knocked on the door – a woman opened it - and he said, "*John 3:16*"... that night the boy was fed with many good things - and he thought to himself, "*John 3:16 - I don't know what this means but it sure makes a hungry boy feel full*"...

after dinner the woman gave him a bar of soap and a towel and let him bathe in a warm bath... and after the bath the boy said to himself, "*John 3:16 - I don't understand it – but it sure is making me feel clean*"...

that same lady gave the boy a warm bed to sleep in, tucked him in, and gave him a kiss goodnight... and again the boy said, "*John 3:16 - I don't understand it but it sure makes a tired boy feel rested*"...

The next morning the woman fed the boy breakfast, took out a Bible and said, "*Do you know what John 3:16 means?*"...

The boy said, "*No ma'am, I don't... the first time I ever heard it was when the police officer told me to use it*"...

so the woman read it to him from the Bible - and then she told him about Jesus dying on the cross - and she said, "*no matter what may come your way – remember God loves you – and God is on your side!*"...

and according to the story, on that day the little boy gave his heart and life to Jesus - and then sat there quietly and thought - "*John 3:16, I still don't fully understand it – but it sure makes a lost boy feel safe*"...

Friends, I can't explain to you why God loves us either (nor do I fully understand it)... and yes, I do know that none of us deserve it (and none of us are worthy of it) but what I can tell you is that it is the greatest promise of God)... and to believe in that love for your life (is a promise that you will have all that you need) not only in this world – but also in the world to come...

For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life...

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May you stop on this day to count your blessings... May you be humble enough to see your life as a gift... and may you be patient enough to find the presence of God walking with you (every step of the way)...

In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!