

Church of our Saviour
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

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The Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 14, 2021

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Text: John 3:14-21

Title: "God So Loved the World"

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In the Name of (+) Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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I don't think I've ever run across a Christian, old or young, male or female, Lutheran or whatever, who didn't know from memory the Bible verse, found in today's Gospel Lesson from John's gospel,

"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!" (John 3:16)

That verse has been called the "gospel in a nutshell!" Meaning, it is right at the center, At the core of things, Christian! That verse has motivated Christians to go all over this world to tell others of that love!

I've known men and women and have heard their stories with great admiration who have gone to places faraway, like

Nigeria and India and Korea and Viet Nam and Europe! I have also spent lots of time with those who have gone into the inner-city around our land to tell the story of God's love for the people there!

And, then, we get to the religion itself and how it practices the faith given to it! There are complications! There are questions! There are issues! There are disagreements! And there is not always love for all people! We find reasons to exclude!

During seminary days I was invited, along with two other seminary students, to attend a church meeting in a Lutheran church! We were there to observe and to learn!

In that meeting it was discussed, shall a black couple be given permission to have their wedding in the white church where we worshiped! Their church was too small! Our church, basically a white congregation was bigger! The wedding was allowed!

And, then the discussion turned to the use of restrooms! Could the black people use the restrooms, it was asked? It got heated! Finally, after lots of angry words, permission was granted! And, I said to myself, is this really, church?

It goes on!

There's something about us humans that makes us hard and unbending! We'd rather draw the line than open the door! We'd rather say "no," rather than "yes!" We'd rather punish than rehabilitate! In fact, we probably rather throw away the

hard to handle people, the misfits, the trouble-makers, rather than save them!

And, it runs against our instincts, apparently, when God, the Father, makes it clear, that Jesus was not sent to this world to condemn the world, it, but to save it! For some reason, we don't believe it's possible to save sinners and wrong-doers!

About three weeks ago Kay and I were at Advent Church, Cedarburg, making bag lunches, 185 of them, for people in the inner city of Milwaukee! Afterward I got to our car first, and as I waited, I watched the people walking by, many of them with dogs! It's a Cedarburg thing, walking dogs downtown on Washington Avenue!

Then, a man came by with three dogs! One big! Two, small! Our church puts food and water out in front of our church for dogs! The man's big dog was so eager to get to the pail with cover over it, containing dog biscuits the dog dumped it over! The biscuits flew all over in front of our church!

And the man walking those dogs just lost it! He kicked that dog over and over! And I wondered as I watched, why? Why was that the first thing that came to that man? Why punishment? Why that, first?

Shouldn't we as human beings, some of us filled with religious faith, do better than we are doing? Why can't we catch on? God, the One who leads us, did not send his Son into this world to condemn it! His Son came to love us all and save us all! God came to save us! Why isn't that our first reaction to

things happening in our world, even the evil, wrong things?
Why do we lash out first?

The world and many of its people are evil! Make no mistake! There are white supremacists! Adolf Hitlers do come along! As they did in Germany! The land of Bach and Beethoven, and Kant and Hegel, of Luther and Brahms! They were hardly barbarians! And, there was the holocaust! As terrible a thing as could happen! What makes us as we are?

What would cause anyone to cut a deep cut across the face, ear to ear, of a Chinese man just walking down the street minding his own business!

There is evil in our world! We know! We're hardly shocked anymore! There is pride! And lust! And gluttony! And anger! And laziness! And envy! And greed! There is evil in this world!

It started way back! When Cain killed his brother Abel! And then asked, almost like what he did wasn't that wrong! "Am I my brother's keeper?" If Cain was truly looking for an answer! Of course, you are, Cain! Like we all are! You are your brother's keeper! And, so are we!

If it is the intention of our Lord to cause the people of this world to be motivated first and above all by grace and mercy and love! So why the many stories of punishment? Rather than mercy and love? Why heavy penalties as the only way to respond to those who have committed crimes? Why not more second chances and opportunities for getting life back on track? Why do we hit first and gives pats on the back almost reluctantly?

God so loved the world! And, so we make meals for a neighbor whose cancer will definitely kill him! We send checks to our favorite charities, knowing that, for every child that money feeds, there will be tens of thousands still hungry! We linger at the bedside, if the COVID rules allow, and hold the hands of loved ones afflicted with dementia, knowing full well that no matter how long we stay, they won't remember who we are! We pray for peace in this world, peace that never comes, because love and mercy is not expressed as it should be! We pray, for an end to systemic injustice, and political corruption, and the crisis of climate change or the wearying death toll of the pandemic, and we understand that our prayers may not see answers for months, and years, and decades, or centuries!

And, so it is our prayer, our most serious and earnest and heartfelt prayer, that we love this world as you do! AMEN

