

God Loves the World

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The World is Messed Up

On the front of your bulletin you will see a picture of Mary and Joseph. It looks like they are posing for a Christmas card doesn't it? Or maybe I'm mistaken, maybe that's how every mother looks right after giving birth with no epidural no midwives no hospital bed. If we took an honest look at Mary and Joseph on Christmas night they'd be a mess. Isn't it that way with the rest of the world? "It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas", or so goes the song, "toys in every store." People are smiling and singing. But what if we considered not just how the world looks at Christmas, but everything about the world. Not just the toys in every store but the motivation, and the greed, behind those toys. What if we considered that $\frac{3}{4}$ of a billion people around the world will be hungry while we eat Christmas dinner.¹ What if we considered that in Outagamie County, 87% of mental illness goes untreated.² What if we considered child soldiers, civil war, and racism. If we consider not just how the world appears but everything about the world, how would you feel?

You are Messed Up

What if we consider everything about you? On your Christmas card I have no doubt that you appear lovely, because today you are all dressed up and smiling! But what if we considered not just your Christmas Eve, not just your social media? What if we considered everything about you, including what you do when nobody is looking? Considered the things you do that make you clear your web browser history? Consider the shame you feel when you look into the eyes of a certain friend or family member. Considered why some of you purposely avoid driving through a certain parts of town? What about those times you stand in front of the mirror and you wonder if you've become something you promised you would never be? What if we considered your worry, sadness, loneliness? If you consider everything about you, how do you feel about you? What would you do? Is the solution to this messy world education? Is the solution to try harder or give more money? Is the solution to do as much good as we can, so that the good might outweigh the bad. Or maybe we should just look on the bright side and just be ignorant of all those ugly things? Humans have been trying these solutions for centuries. How's that working out?

You know considering everything is not a hypothetical. I'm aware of a legend about someone who sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been

bad or good. He considers everything about you, why? So that he can sit as a perfectly just judge, giving prizes to good people and doling out punishments to bad people. The solution? "You better watch out!" This is supposed to bring joy to our children.

The testimony of the Bible from start to finish is that God considers not just how you appear, but everything about you. And so many people think that God does the same thing as Santa — that he considers everything so that he can be a perfect judge and give prizes to good people and punishments to bad people. That's what people believe about God, but what does the Bible say?

God Loves the World

The Bible's teaching on this topic is the most ridiculous quote of all time and it is also the most beautiful quote of all time. God sees everything about you and how does he feel? From the mouth of Jesus, **"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

There is no explanation whatsoever. It just says, he loves you. Can you believe it? Everything in your past that you will take to your grave, everything you just felt as you consider your present, all your regrets and mistakes; all the pain you've felt and all the pain you've caused, God sees it all and how does he feel? He loves you. It's ridiculous. It's beautiful.

And it means that even if it feels like nobody in this world loves you, even if you are not worthy of love, even if you don't love yourself, you have to consider this unexplainable, ridiculous, beautiful quote from Jesus, "God. Loves. You."

Jesus Proves God's Love

But talk is cheap. I can say I love you all day long but that doesn't make it so. What will you give me to prove your love? Politicians say they love the people, but ask for some of their campaign money and see what you get. Some celebrities say that they love all people, but ask to borrow the Mercedes and see if you get past the front gate.

There is a famous quote from a popular American philosopher about the cost of love. It's Michael Scott from "The Office." ([Play Michael Scott video](#)).³ That's a joke, but there is a grain of truth to it. That's why you set a price limit when you do a gift exchange — so that one person doesn't feel big love when they get a big present while another person else feels unloved when they get a small present. (That's actually what happens in that episode of The Office.) Imagine opening Christmas presents with your family and they all keep saying "I love you!" but inside every one of your presents you find a lump of coal. Don't ask me how I know what that feels like. The point is, talk is cheap. We use gifts to show love.

Jesus Is the Greatest Gift

John 3:16 says **“God loved the world”** but talk is cheap, so what? **“God loved the world so that he gave.** Gave what? **“He gave his one and only Son.”**

If we used the Michael Scott method to calculate love according to the cost of the gift, how much does God love you? He could have given you anything in this world, which he made. But he decided to give you something out of this world!

By definition the maker of the world is more valuable than anything he made. And God gave his Son who made the world, more valuable than anything else, and he gave it to you! Imagine what it cost him! If your child was recovering in a hospital bed and the doctor comes in. **knock** **knock** “The girl a next door is dying of a heart condition. We can save her, but only if you are willing to give her your child’s heart. Of course that will mean that your child will die.” Would you do it for a friend? For an enemy? For someone who has all the sin, and shame that you have? God did. **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Baby Jesus is the most valuable gift ever!

And not just the most valuable, but also the most practical. Maybe this year you are hoping to unwrap some practical things; a drill, a phone, some socks. Those things are usually added to the list not because of their price tag, but because you need them. There’s a good reason we don’t put our deepest needs on a Christmas list. If you put on your list, “This year for Christmas I’d like to feel whole again.” Or, “For Christmas please help me to overcome my fear of not being good enough.” To whom would you give that list? You could give it to God.

He gave you his Son, who meets your deepest needs. The baby born to Mary can take from you all the guilt, all the shame, all the sin that messes up good days and keeps you awake at night. That’s what Jesus came to do. He lived 33 years perfectly—no sin, no guilt, no shame of his own. And yet at the end of his journey we find him walking toward a hill with a cross on his back, crushed, overwhelmed, and crying out to God. Why? Because on that day all the things you don’t like about you, they were transferred to Jesus. Imagine your baggage on Jesus’ back. Multiply that guilt times 7 billion, that’s the weight of the world right now. Multiply that times all the ages that have come before us and all the ages that will come after us, and that is the mess of the world laid on Jesus. He took that mountain of sin to the cross with the guiltiest conscience in the history of the world. And on the cross justice was served. Jesus received from God what you and I deserve as God poured out all his anger and his wrath on his own Son. He did that so now, he has no anger left for you. You get what Jesus earned—a perfectly clean record. That’s forgiveness. That’s the gift of God!

Trusting Jesus

“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son!” Can you believe it? God says you can. That’s what we do here at Mount Olive. We meet at church and school to tell each other over and over again that God loves you. The more you hear about Jesus, the more you trust him. Before I say Amen, I have to tell you two ways believing in Jesus will change your life.

First, it will change your eternity. **“Whoever believes in [Jesus] will not perish but have eternal life.”** One time, Publisher’s Clearing House promised me \$14,000 a week for the rest of my life. (It’s just there’s a 1 in 175 million chance I will get it.) That’s a great prize. But compared to eternal life, that money would be like a drop of spit in the ocean. Eternal life is not a long shot. It has already been deposited in my account in the bank of heaven—it is available for me and you and everyone who believes. What could be better than that?

How about eternal life in heaven PLUS a new perspective in life here on earth. Jesus can change your eternity AND your January! In January the world will still be a mess. There will still be hunger, illness, war and pain. But trust in Jesus means that God has seen our world, and loved us and done something to redeem this mess. He gave his Son! In January you will look in the mirror and you will see a mess. When you don’t love what you see in the mirror, remember that God does.

In fact, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** That’s why you and I can consider everything about each other and still wish one another a Merry Christmas, and happy new year.

Amen.

¹ <http://www.foodaidfoundation.org/world-hunger-statistics.html>

² <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p00613-17.pdf>

³ <https://vlipsy.com/vlip/eFn1UMYv>