

Sermon Holy Trinity 2020

June 7, 2020

John 3:1-17 (&18)

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read especially its last verse and the verse following the reading which together read: **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”**

Nighttime. Darkness. This is the picture John paints with Nicodemus coming for what appears to be a sort of reconnaissance mission. He’s going and asking the questions. Seeking the information. Is he doing this for himself? Is he doing this for the council, the Sanhedrin? It’s unclear. But he starts, **“Rabbi, WE know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.”** Of course, the conversation takes a turn undoubtedly unexpected by Nicodemus from there. It takes a turn that shows just how lacking Nicodemus is in his understanding. It shows that the darkness surrounding Nicodemus isn’t just the literal nighttime around him. No, there is the darkness of a lack of understanding. There is a darkness of unbelief.

But we know what surrounds nighttime and darkness, don’t we? Those of you with children know all the more. There’s the fear when the light goes off. There’s the worry about what’s really there that we can’t see. There’s anxiety about what could come in the midst of darkness. And what’s the real issue? It’s unknown what is there.

In our current time there’s a lot of darkness. We have the darkness of the coronavirus which has been weighing on us for months. There’s the darkness of what this will mean for the economy. There’s the darkness of having been secluded from one another for this time of orders to stay at home. And in the last few weeks we’ve seen the darkness of the effects of racism rearing its head. That being compounded by the darkness of looting and rioting.

Something that struck me this week is how this is all nothing new. You see, we have a darkness that also surrounds us that we don’t recognize. That’s how dark it is. It’s so dark, it’s like Nicodemus where we often don’t recognize it. That darkness is that we actually think we’re exceptional in our day. We think that we have actually

come to the point where we are so much smarter and further—I don't know if this how many would say it, but it seems to be the perception—further evolved than those who have come before us. And to be fair, technologically we have a lot of advances and aids we didn't have before. This sort of improvement can easily delude us into thinking we're somehow truly more enlightened than those who have come before us. For sure this means we do have insight that was not present before. Certainly we also have capabilities that were unavailable to previous generations, especially medically. But the reality is we aren't exceptional.

For example, as we look at something like the current situation occurring with racial tensions, the reactions of people in terms of violence is not new. And as I say this, I want to be clear that we understand racism is always a sin whether it's white people being racist toward black people or toward Hispanic people, or any other group, as well as the reverse. This is always a sin. I also want to say that destruction of the property of another is sinful as well—and as I say that, I'm not talking about protesting in and of itself. As Americans we are guaranteed the freedom to assemble peacefully, just as we are to practice our faith. But as I say all of that, as we look at what's going on, this sort of tension is not something new. We're not exceptional.

Case in point, I was reminded this week of the Peasant's Revolt at the time of Luther. If you aren't familiar with that, what happened is that a lot of people interpreted Luther's resistance to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church as a go ahead for their own resistance. Finally, groups of peasants determined to band together and rebel. When news of this came to Luther, he wrote a work condemning their rebellion. In fact, he condemned it in the harshest of terms. With that the rulers saw him giving them an OK to dismantle the rebellion without prejudice. The result was over 100,000 deaths. To be fair to Luther, he did say this ultimately was too harsh, but the damage was done. What's my point?

My point is that we see this darkness not only now, but in similar fashion then. Certainly there are different causes and different concerns now. But we are not exceptional in seeing violence taken on both sides in both cases.

What's my point in all of this though? My point is that this misguided exceptionalism that we have, this darkness that we are seeing in that, that we are seeing in so many circumstances, all points to this last verse of our reading and the verse just following it—the verses I read to start: **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is**

condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Now you might wonder how those words connect to the examples I was just pointing to. They connect especially in these words: **God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world... but whoever does not believe in is condemned already.** The connection is to say that when we look at this darkness, at our misguided exceptionalism and the darkness of the circumstances around us, it shows us the condemnation of the world. God didn't send His Son into the world to condemn it. It was condemned already. It was condemned into this separation from God by sin. It was condemned to experiencing the consequences of sin. You wonder why we don't have vaccines for every ailment? You wonder why new ailments, new viruses, coronaviruses, flus, super-bacteria, keep appearing? Because our sin bears with it the consequence that we experience death, and the death brings with it all of these manifestations. We're not going to overcome it by our ingenuity. Sure we might someday create a computer program that captures the mannerisms and thought processes of someone, or we might someday find a way to revive Ted Williams' cryonically frozen and preserved remains, returning animation to them, but we're not going to permanently overcome death.

But Christians, as we look at this darkness, as we look at this condemnation, we do on the feast of Holy Trinity. And what we see on this day is that in a great mystery, our Triune God has seen fit to save us from a condemned world. Now, when we speak of this mystery, what we see is not only the mystery of our salvation, but the mystery of who our Triune God is. We see that there is the Father who created, who sent His Son. There is that Son, who redeems. There is the Spirit who is sent by Father and Son to sanctify.

In fact, as we look at this reading we see all three of those persons of the Trinity. Look at that verse we all know so well: **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** There is the Father. The Father who loves this world so much, He sends His Son to it. This is the world that rightly stands condemned under sin, that world whose darkness shows itself as I've been talking about. Or as Psalm 51 puts it: **"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment."** This darkness and sin is just cause for condemnation and judgment. But what does the Father see? He sees His love for this broken world.

If you know the story of Hosea in the Old Testament, you see this. Hosea's wife constantly leaves and commits adultery. And time and time again, Hosea retrieves her. He brings her back into his household out of love for her, and forgives her. That's the Father's love for us. And that's what the Son shows by coming into this world. He shows it by bearing that sin on the cross. You see Him bearing the death that causes illness and coronaviruses. You see Him bearing the hate that underlies racism. You see Him bearing the hurt that motivates outrage and abuse of property. All of that He carries in His body. And think of the mystery that body is. There is the human body, bearing the fullness of the divinity within it. How so? We don't know, but it's there in Him. This mystery of our faith. The mystery of this holy God bearing our sin, being our Savior, and in that even overcoming death itself.

Then there's the Spirit. Jesus said, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."** And that's what this Spirit does. He gives you new birth in Christ. He rescues you from the darkness of the sinfulness of this world, and He recreates you in that image of your Lord. He brings that light of Christ's life to you. He does this as He baptizes you, and makes you His own in that birth of water and the Spirit. Spirit giving birth to spirit.

And these three persons are all One God. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Spirit. The Spirit is not the Father. The Father and the Spirit did not bear your sin on the cross, the Son did. But all three participate in the work of your salvation. And all three are one Being, One God. How does that work? We don't know.

But what we do know is that by the work of the Spirit, we know the Son. And by the work of the Son, we know the Father. And what we see is what I said before. In a great mystery, our Triune God has seen fit to save us from a condemned world. It is mysterious, this great love for us. It's a blessing, but a mystery. We are so broken, and we are so lost. Yet He still loves us. He still rescues us. And most of all, as we see this darkness I'm speaking of, His light shines through it. We might have our thoughts of our exceptionalism, we might have our wrestlings with trusting Him with everything going on. But He is the One who has all things in His hand. He is the One who brings light in this darkness. And He brings that light to each and every one of you by His grace. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Holy, Holy, Holy. Amen.