

“God Loves the World”

John 3: 14-18

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

Preparing your resume: Most of us have done it: we need to find a job, but we first must prepare a document called a ‘resume’ to advertise ourselves. Often it is good to have someone who knows you well to help you formulate the document. This is helpful, because we often underestimate our abilities. The person who knows you will be able to put on paper your talents and gifts which will be useful to an employer. Building or updating a resume is a good exercise in helping you recall your skills and give you confidence as you enter into the task of promoting yourself in a good way. Resumes are usually backed up with references.

Does God have a resume? If you look at the Psalms of praise to God, there are lines of what God has done to bring forth life and to sustain life. The Bible articulates the fact about God’s un failing and steadfast love. In our scripture reading today from John 3: 16, we read, **“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.”** This is a famous and often quoted passage, which speaks about the most powerful attribute of God – that God loves the world!

How do we know that God loves the world? The world can be a sinful, dangerous and corrupting place. There is so much war, hunger, greed, deceit, split up families, accidents, murder, illness, that we hear on the news. So many believers over the years put an emphasis on fleeing the wicked world which is full of sin.

The Good News! The greatest Good news is that in spite of it all, God not only loves the World, but he gave his most precious gift to the world - his Son Jesus Christ. God certainly knew about sin and dealt with it in individuals like Cain, King David, to name a few. God also addressed the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sin of the Isrealites and other surrounding nations as found in the pages of scripture. Through Jesus’ final defeat of sin through his death and resurrection we know that sin (injustice, hate, fear, apathy, etc) does not have the final word! In spite of sin, God insists that the world is lovable and that God loved the world first, and desires that we see that. The message of God’s love for the world is that we are to uncover it and celebrate God’s presence. God wants us to know that in the midst of sin and suffering, God’s love rules.

God is not separate from the world. In spite of the evil we see around us, which obscures our vision of God, God loves the world and therefore he is present. We are to pay attention to God’s everyday grace within and around us.

Uncovering God: Belgium Roman Catholic Theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914-2009) told the story of his experience when joining the Dominican order at an early age. Part of the routine among the Dominicans was to rise at 2am like the monks and then go to the choir and chant the morning office (praying the Psalms).

This practice captured the imagination of this young man and set him apart from the busyness of the world and helped him feel closer to God. With enthusiasm he wrote his father saying that he felt so wonderful praising God when the world around him was sleeping and he was giving glory to God. His father responded by saying to his son that he was glad that he appreciated the monastic life, but to keep in mind that when Edward was a baby and one of thirteen children, his parents were also up at 2am and giving glory to God though they were not singing the Psalms at that hour.

The father's point is important. Though it is necessary to make quiet space for God in keeping the relationship with God strong, His father said in effect that it is in the everyday living that we can uncover God who loves the world. For example, God is present in assisting your children with homework, in doing the dishes, in feeding your family, in giving comfort to others and in the everyday conducting of our business.

Certainly the monastery experience is important and necessary in the sense that we take the time out and pray and reflect by taking a retreat from the busy world. In prayer we become closer in our relationship with God, and in the practice of prayer, we will increasingly sense his love for the world and for all people. Though it is very healthy to go away on a spiritual retreat from time to time, we do not always need to be geographically away from the world to pray. Taking quiet time with God every day where we live, prepares us for the busyness of the coming day. The quiet time reminds us of the need to also pray during the everyday activities of life. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, prayer (conversation with God) is a means by which our heart changes more in line with God who loves the world and loves you!

I believe that is one of the reasons we come to church, to recover that sense of vision to celebrate our loving God who we have encountered all week (without often realizing it). At worship we are reminded of God's presence through the prayers, the music, the Bible reading and the presence of one another. The Lord's Supper we celebrate today is Jesus' reminder to us that in God's love for the world he sent his Son Jesus to make visible God's love. When we participate in eating the bread and drinking from the cup, we have the opportunity to experience his presence in our bodies, in our hearts, and in the body of Christ (his congregation).

In bringing healing and unity to the world, there is nothing more important than to present God's resume. In other words, we are to advertise God's love for the world through our words and actions. The Bible lists God's attributes and encourages you to receive the gift of his Son and let his daily presence grow in your heart. Friend: Pray in your quiet devotional time and in your daily activities in life. He is present - we just need to clear our vision. Amen.