

“Words of Wanderers”

John 3:14-21

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A young man walked into a photographer's studio with a framed picture of his girlfriend. He asked to have the picture duplicated in high resolution and printed on heavy paper so it would last. The photographer said, "Must be serious." The young man said, "Absolutely. This one's for life." The photographer noticed an inscription on the back of the photo: "My sweetheart Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever. I am yours for all eternity." It was signed, "Diane." Then, there was a P.S.: "If we ever break up, I want this picture back." In our relationships, it is a little hard to guarantee the promise of eternal love.

Today's Scripture reading is part of a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus, a religious leader, came to Jesus Christ in the darkness of night and asked him a question on how to be "saved and to enter the Kingdom of God". Jesus told him that he must be "born again" to receive "eternal life". Clearly, Jesus didn't mean to say that he must enter a second time into a mother's womb to be born.

Two weeks ago, when my wife had back muscle spasms, she had to stop nursing baby Jacob due to strong medications. Now, when he goes to sleep every night, he tends to do a little strange act: Laying down his ear and head on his mother's stomach like an infant's position in his mother's womb. I don't know why he does it. Maybe it helps him to make the difficult transition from nursing and remembering the closeness to his mother. He can't go back to the nursing or to the womb. Jesus reminded Nicodemus that he had to be spiritually born again in order to renew himself and make a fresh start in God. Jesus introduced him to a new God, not written in the Moses' law, but who personally encounters him as his Messiah and Savior. Then "eternal life" would be given him a gift of God.

"Eternal life" doesn't mean something we hope for our future like endless duration of physical human existence, but it means "the unending presence of God" in our daily life. Once we are born again and we are connected to the love of God, nothing else on this earth, even the power of death can separate us from the love of God. But we can live in the unending presence of God. This is the understanding of "eternal life." Jesus continued to explain to Nicodemus why God sacrificed his only son and wanted to give us eternal life. We all know

verse 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.” Christian conviction is that God loved the world no matter who you are. Whether you need God or not, no matter if you like God or hate God. God loves you as you are nevertheless. The more important of God’s promise is after verse 16. “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” The purpose of God’s sacrificial act is not to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. God’s love has no bounds.

God loved the world, which means that it doesn’t merely mean that God loved those who like him, but God loved everyone. This was a new and provocative faith statement to the religious leader, Nicodemus: God accepts and welcomes you regardless of your circumstances whether you feel you are worthy or not, rejected and marginalized by the world, God loves you as you are. That is absolutely amazing news! Jesus illustrated a metaphor of light and darkness to describe God’s saving grace and love for the world: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. God brings light where there is darkness, to change the circumstances in our human condition. If our deeds are evil, the light comes to embrace us in our darkness and to save us.

The meaning of “save” in the original Greek text is to “bring into a large open space.” That is a unique concept of salvation. Jean Paul Sartre, the great French philosopher, wrote a play entitled *No Exit*. He explained that the human condition and our life was like being trapped in a room from which there was no escape. But our Scripture reading gives us great hope that God so loved the world that he will guide us, each of us, into a wide and broad space, where there are new alternatives to our dead ends. Our Christian faith in God is not that life has *No Exit*, but that it has an open door to a new life. If we can compare our life to a boat sailing in the storms of life without any direction on the darkest night, Jesus Christ came to us as a light to rescue us. Think about your own darkness, which keeps you from the light of Christ.

There is a powerful story that I would like to share with you (D.L. Moody’s anecdotes). It was a dark night and a man on the ship had fallen overboard. Another man was very sea sick and wondered what he could possibly do to help him. He grabbed a light and held it up to a port-hole. Rescuers saved the drowning man. Later, when the other man got over his sea sickness, he came up on deck and talked to the one who was rescued. The rescued man described what happened in the water, how he had gone down a second time, and was just going down again for the last time, when he put out his hand. He said just then someone held a light at the port-hole, and the light fell on his hand. A rescuer

saw the illuminated hand, reached out and grabbed his hand and pulled him into the lifeboat. It was a small light, but it made all the difference, between life and death, hope and despair, a light stronger than the darkness shining across the sea.

In life, we are afraid of the feelings of fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and despair which threaten us. This darkness always discourages us. God sent us his only Son, Jesus Christ for salvation, which takes us and opens the door into the new world of life. The light of Christ will rescue us out of despair, fear, and the hopeless world and will renew us with the promise of eternal life. Do you remember the song, “I want to walk as a child of the Light; I want to follow Jesus. In him there is no darkness at all; shine in my heart, Lord Jesus.” God’s light will shine onto each of us. May God’s light shine upon each of your hearts with the promise of a new life, a fresh start in Christ as you continue your journey.