

Today God lays out the divine game plan for us in these familiar words: “God so loved the world that God gave the only begotten Son so that whoever believes might have eternal life. God did not send the son to condemn the world, but in order that the world would be saved through him...” and I ask that we ponder together this gift of God. What is at stake and what does it mean for me?

A man named Nicodemus has come to Jesus in the middle of the night with some pressing questions. Jesus just doesn't fit into any of the boxes that Nicodemus had learned in his religious education. Nicodemus stumbles around in the dark, confused and disoriented, “who are you and how do you do the things you do?”

And Jesus says, “I am the one descended from heaven. Trust in me and you will know eternal life. God loves you.”

What more can be said? Isn't this the last word? Yes, but I'm not sure it is particularly clear.

This passage has become a Christian bumper sticker....God so loved the world..” is printed on T shirts and wall plaques and key chains. Except, like Nicodemus.....we say the words, we are unsure of the implications.

What does it mean to love and be loved, especially by the Divine Creator?

Over 20 years I have officiated countless weddings where St Pauls ancient words are read: “ Love is patient, love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.” I expect these words are meant to capture the essence of the love that brings these two people together. I think they also represent their deepest hopes and fears.

At one wedding, a second marriage, a mature couple...they chose to write their own vows. His were short. The bride's, however, were two pages - I think she included something about morning coffee. A litany of hopes and fears.

St Paul was right. love is patient and kind and does not rejoice in the wrong but rejoices in the right. On any given day, these words provide good guidance on how to live in love with another person.

But the real thing to remember is this: love requires making a gift of yourself to another human being: stripping everything away and becoming vulnerable in their presence. It requires deep trust and a commitment to stick it out until the end, to risk being wounded. It is no wonder that we are fearful in the presence of love.

Love creates a crisis for us: it makes demands. We must choose: to allow it to draw us into a relationship that requires giving and receiving; a relationship where we allow more and more of ourselves to be revealed to the other. OR to reject the offer, to remain hidden to the other.

We choose the light or the darkness – again and again. Each step along the way we choose between standing vulnerable in the bright light of another's love – or to hold back, cling a bit to the darkness, to reserve something to ourselves.

We decide whether today it is safe to trust....to believe....all that the other has promised....to believe....that the other is good and true....to believe that all intentions are noble and fair.

To love another is a fearful and fear-filled journey.

So God loved first, to show us the way, to get us started.

God emptied himself of glory and came to us in Jesus: accepting the limits and consequences of taking on human flesh, including death...why? Because God loves the world God created and desires a relationship with us. Not just the world in general, but with each one of God's beloved creatures. As vulnerable as an innocent lover, God comes into our crazy and evil addicted world in order to draw us into the Divine Life.

Jesus becomes a bright light in the midst of our shadowed lives and draws us to himself....asking us to listen to his words, to watch Divine Love at work among us, to open ourselves to the light, to be healed and fed and comforted....andto trust.

Jesus' goal is to bring healing and wholeness to this creation and all who inhabit it. His mission – which he clearly accepted! – was and is and will always be to love creation into full and abundant life, life which we cannot even imagine. He draws all creation to himself – to light – to life – in a never ending effort to bring all into life. He will destroy evil, put down

tyrants, sweep away injustice while all the time inviting us to stand in the light...to shed the ways of darkness, and to become a better version of ourselves, what God has always known us to be.

Jesus asks us to trust that his promises are true, that his intentions are honorable, that his way leads to lifeto trust him and the God who sent him. Jesus asks that we make a gift of ourselves: become like a child, open to good. To TRUST that God's love is faithful and eternal.

What does this look like for you? What would happen if you trusted God's light more deeply? What if you trusted that you are worthy of the love that is drawing you into life? What would you learn about yourself? How would you see the world differently?

In this season of Lent we are encouraged to practice trusting in God. We fast and trust that God will provide. We give more generously and trust that God's gifts are abundant. We discard the practices of darkness that cling to us.

....and at each turn we allow God to draw us ever more deeply into the love which is life. We trust in the Jesus who laid it all down for our sake – following his path. And we give thanksfor this gift that defies comprehension: the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

AMEN

Like Nicodemus, we find it all very confusing....and possibly a little frightening. It is too much to grasp – more difficult than particle physics or the moods of a teenager. What do we do with such a pronouncement?