

"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. (John3:16)

How many times have we heard this verse from the Gospel of John? It has been a rallying cry for Evangelicals and graced many a bumper sticker. Like many such sayings it becomes easy for us to lose its full impact. For example:

"Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration."
—Thomas A. Edison and its corollary: How do you get to Carnegie hall? Practice, Practice, Practice!

We can agree with Edison's basic premise, but still not really hear it, not internalize it. Have you never been dismissive of a performer or athlete's success? We may not be aware of all the work required to be successful, nor of the toll it takes on their lives and bodies. Still the bottom line is that if we want to become successful at something, even if we don't expect to achieve fame and fortune, we need to work at it whether it's baking pie, repairing cars, or running a business.

Therefore, it is useful to examine John 3:16 more closely to grasp the awesome implications of God's love..

"God so loved the world"; we may take God's love for granted in the midst of the challenges of our everyday lives. We may not stop to appreciate the evidence of God's love but God's love for the world is because God created the world - with love.

The beauty of God's creation never ceases to amaze and inspire – especially in the Spring. Spring brings forth life, growing things: plants and trees beginning to bud and the possibility of warmth and renewal is all around us. Spring is an example of how God created life to be good. That goodness is also evident in the birth of living things, babies, puppies, kittens, all these are a miracle. This renewal of life reminds us that all creation is related. "The Circle of Life" for all you Lion King's fans. All of this is true and yet we managed to screw things up. Conflict and strife are everywhere, justice is frequently elusive, and much of the world is in need of basic necessities.

God saw the mess we were making of the world which we know through the writings of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament. Then God did something new. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son", that very Son who as God's Word created the world, whom we would come to know as Jesus - because of God's love.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:17)

We don't know exactly how Jesus was planning to save the world but he came proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near and "that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life".

There were miracles, there was teaching, there was the man himself who would defy the religious authorities and even the mighty Roman Empire. Jesus also knew that he was to be a sacrifice.

The implications for what God was doing in sending his only Son into the world can take your breath away. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Visualize a young man in the full vigor of his youth: his strength, his confidence, his beauty, his potential. Yet God did not send God's Son to be successful in the eyes of the world but to set things aright for all of creation. God was sending Jesus to certain rejection, torture, and death.

Most parents would be willing to sacrifice their lives for their children.

Would you who have children willingly send your child to his or her death in order to "save" the world?

God knew that only Jesus could save the world from itself and because God loved the world God was willing to offer us Jesus, "the glory as of a father's only Son" as the means for our salvation.

And so Jesus came and offered himself to us. Jesus said "Believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14:1) He offered himself to us so that through him, through believing in him and the relationship he had with God, we too might become children of God.

As children of God we are invited into the joy of eternal life but eternal life operates on two levels. Jesus was not just offering the hope of being with God after our death but of life transformed in the moment by a new and personal relationship with God through Jesus.

Believing in him is to do those things that he taught, "to love one another as I have loved you". (John 13:34)

Jesus so loved the world that he gave his life "so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life"

The crux of John's gospel is all there in John 3:16. Eternal life through Jesus, a gift given because of God's love; all we have to do is accept it.

Amen