

March 10, 2024
Fourth Sunday in Lent

“Searching the Darkness”

John 3:14-21

If there is one thing the whole transgender movement has taught us, it is that man has an incredible ability to fool himself into not seeing that which should be obvious. The binary reality of male/female is obvious in biology, in anatomy, in every single culture since the dawn of mankind. Yet in the last five minutes a sizable swath of western society has convinced themselves, “Nope! It’s all in one’s mind. If one believes one to be another gender, then reality has fundamentally changed in order to accommodate that.” The truth is still as obvious as it has ever been, but they refuse to see it.

This is also true for a lot of folks who consider themselves part of the Christian church. If you watched the Super Bowl last month you may have seen this commercial by a group called “He Gets Us” that featured some strange pairings of people washing other people’s feet. The commercial finished up with the words, “Jesus didn’t teach hate. He washed feet. He gets us. All of us.” My reaction at the time was: “Ambiguous much? What is that supposed to mean?”

But I’ve been to the group’s website and read what they have to say and it seems to boil down to this: Jesus doesn’t care a bit about what you do, what kind of lifestyle you live, what kind of sin you might be immersing yourself in—Jesus loves you and accepts you just the way you are, sin and all. And I’ll add that it seems anyone who doesn’t agree with that would be considered by He Gets Us as one of those “haters” that isn’t at all following Jesus.

Truth be told, a lot of people think this way. They read John 3:16, “*For God so love the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life,*” but that’s about all they read and consider about Jesus. They then translate that into Jesus being all about love, love, love, which is actually true, but they take His love to mean that He thinks you’re peachy just the way you are, mired in sin and wretchedness and evil. They simply ignore that Jesus called sinners to repentance in faith; that He died to take away our sins, not to be okay with them.

The context in John makes this clear. Jesus is comparing the love and mercy God showed to Israel by a bronze snake statue when they were under His wrath for their faithlessness and dying from poisonous fiery serpent bites in the wilderness to His sending Jesus to be raised up on the cross to pay for and take away mankind’s sins that all who looked in faith upon Him raised up would not die. You should read this as “*For God **in this same manner** loved the world, that he gave His only son...*”

But you can’t just stop at John 3:16. Jesus keeps talking and you have to keep hearing. He says He does not come to condemn, but to save. He says one must believe in Him because, if not, one is condemned. And then He says this: “*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*”

There is a judgment! There is evil that people do and Jesus is not okay with it! There is a judgment we bring upon ourselves if we refuse to repent, bring our wicked deeds, our evil sins, into the light and exposed to Christ that His blood would cover them and wash them away. He makes obvious that we have a fallen, corrupted nature that prefers the darkness of sin. Jesus does not come into that darkness to wash our feet there so we can feel all warm and fuzzy in the

blackness of sin! We are to see the light of Christ that exposes the evil of our sins and sees that *“God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* That’s the washing He is talking about here. And thus we then thankfully and joyfully seek to shun all sin and walk in that blessed cleansing as the holy people of God Jesus makes us to be!

This truth is made plain as day here and all over the place in holy Scripture. And yet, we have an incredible ability to fool ourselves into not seeing that which should be obvious.

Let’s consider the sin of greed. Jesus says, *“It is impossible to serve both God and money.”* Yet how many Christians obsess over their wealth, even to the point of begrudging God the amount they surrender to church and charity? Seeing it in the light of Christ it would all be wonderful blessing that God gifts us to manage to His glory. Instead we hold it in the darkness because *“It’s my money!”* and we’d rather God keep His hands off of it.

Consider your sexual relationship with someone to whom you aren’t married—in reality, or in some daydream fantasy with, I don’t know, somebody else’s spouse or movie personality, or pornography person on the computer—is that something kept in the dark because it’s safe there, unexposed, where you can enjoy it’s pleasure and pretend it’s not causing any harm? I mean, really, what does it look like if you pull that out into the light of Jesus? Not good. So where are you keeping it? In the dark, or at the foot of the cross?

Think about simply the way you live life in general. Is your outlook kind of along the lines of *“I’ve got mine, let them get theirs”*? What I mean is this; do you make a practice of withholding love from your neighbor because, well, that’s just not your responsibility? Is your life about taking care of you and yours, and everyone else can do the same? According to the world that’s just fine, but try pulling that attitude into the light of God in Christ, who loved the fallen, broken, rebellious world enough to sacrifice His Son to redeem it? That doesn’t play too well there.

My point here is not to beat you up about your sins.... Okay, maybe that’s a minor point—part of the job description people. But my main point is to exhort you to beware of the darkness! Faithful, repentant life in Christ is continual self-examination, looking to see if some indecency, some evil sin is taking root in your life and beginning to grow. Knowing the light of Christ, we seek to give that poison no shelter, but to drag it before our Savior that it would be robbed of its power to condemn us in the grace of His forgiveness.

Do not fool yourself into not seeing what is obvious—that your evil sin is indeed evil sin. Reality is reality and your fallen nature desiring your sin to be fine with God does not make it so. The light of Christ who died to take evil sin away makes reality plain as day.

Jesus says, *“But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”*

Doing what is true is confessing reality—*“I am a sinner, Jesus, and I have no excuse. Here are my sins. I repent. I beg you, forgive me and save me from death.”*

Just as those who trusted God’s promise and looked on that bronze snake in the wilderness and lived, so does the Father, for Christ’s sake, remove your sins as far as the east is from the west and grant you pardon and everlasting life to those who repentantly look to Christ’s cross. This is reality in the light of Christ!

People beloved by God, stand in His light as you continually search the darkness, leaving no sin unrepented, but bringing them all before the cross of God’s grace. Fully forgiven, then walk in His light, knowing that by His grace you are God’s child, and all of your deeds, all of your life, is being carried out in Him.

Amen.