

Lent 4 3/15/15
John 3:14-21 B

“FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT IN ORDER THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.”

What a wonderful God of love we have! “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.” Simple words. Easy words to understand. Yet, how many people do not understand these words and simply cannot believe them? Why are these words about God so hard to believe? As I thought about that question, I came up with two reasons why people do not believe these words of Jesus and I am going to share those reasons with you this morning.

The first reason is because in this vale of tears in which we live, we live in an environment of condemnation.

For example, take the family, the most intimate structure known to mankind. St. Paul, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even tells us that relationship between husband and wife is a very picture of Christ and His bride, the Church. Yet, how often the home becomes an environment of condemnation.

The husband hears from his wife, “You never show me any affection. You never spend any time with the kids. You never do anything around here. You never help me. You’re never home anyway.”

The wife hears from her husband, “Why is this house such a mess? Do I have to do everything around here? Can’t you do anything right?”

The teenager hears, “Your room is a mess. That music is horrible. Why are you wearing that? Your grades are terrible. When I was your age... You’re so stupid! When are you going to grow up?”

Parents hear from their teenagers, “You’re too strict. Everybody else’s parents say its ok. You just don’t understand.”

Even the smallest of children hears, “Look at your clothes. Just look at the mess you’ve made. You’re bad!”

This is not discipline to correct sinful behavior. This is harsh judgment. Condemnation. At work, at school, even at play, we are condemned. And often, along with the condemnation, is some form of penalty or punishment: bad grades, being picked last in gym class, a letter of reprimand from your boss, silence from your spouse. Living in this environment of condemnation, seeing and hearing, every day, how condemning sinful people can be of other people, it is hard for us to believe that God who is perfect, without sin, will not condemn us.

Jesus says, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” Jesus did not send His Son into the world to condemn, to scold, to rebuke, to nag, to criticize, to chastise, to show us how bad we are; He came to save.

What a precious gift we have in Jesus! We may encounter criticism, judgment, condemnation at home, at work, from family, certainly from our enemies, but there is one person we can go to at all times and find perfect peace -- Jesus, who came to save us, who gives us only comfort and love.

Why do people not have this comfort and peace? Why do they not rejoice in this Good News? We live in an environment of condemnation and there’s second reason: the guilty conscience the Law leaves us with.

“The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).” As we heard last week, God gave the Law through Moses. The Law commands and shows us the anger of God. The Law makes us afraid because it tells us that we will be punished for our sins and that we will die. The Law always accuses and condemns.

But, “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Jesus is not another lawgiver. Jesus did not come to say, “Thou shalt not dance.” Or, “Thou shalt not play cards.” Or, “Thou shalt not eat meat on Friday.”

Jesus is not a new lawgiver. We don’t need new laws. We don’t need more rules. We need grace. Jesus did not come to threaten us, make demands of us, lay a burden of guilt and despair on us. God sent His Son to save the world. Jesus brings us grace, forgiveness, salvation.

If you have been an idolater, a blasphemer, a drunk, an adulterer, a thief, a cheat, a gossip, you would expect judgment, condemnation, punishment, but no, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” Jesus took all of your sins upon Himself, every single sin of thought, word, and deed, was lifted up on the cross for those sins and died for you, enduring your punishment, suffering your death, taking God's anger at your sin upon His own body, so that you would be forgiven. “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” the Bible says (Ro 8).

So, when you feel guilty, remember Jesus has taken away all the shame and guilt of your sin. When you are afraid, remember Jesus has conquered death and hell for you, and opened heaven’s gate to you.

“When I survey the wondrous cross,” we sing this Sunday. Every time you see a cross, it should make you happy, because it reminds you of God’s Son who came into the world not to condemn you, but to save you. What a precious, sweet message is this for people like you and me, people who so often feel condemned.

In our Epistle, Paul writes, “But God...because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.”

In our baptism, “the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” Paul calls it, we are raised to life in Christ and given a new life in Christ. Every day, in Christ, we live as the creations we are in Christ to live and grow before God in true faith and good works.

Just as we have received mercy and forgiveness from Christ, we are merciful and forgiving towards our neighbor, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep, being Christ to our neighbor in all things.

“Lift High the Cross,” we sing in that beloved hymn. We lift high the cross, proclaiming the love of Christ when we live as the new creations we are in Christ. “We lift high the cross” when we call upon God in every trouble and pray to Him; when we believe the promises in His Word; when children love and obey their parents; when fathers do not frustrate their children with unrealistic expectations; when husbands love their wives as Christ has loved the Church and wives submit to their husbands; when help our neighbor; when we defend our neighbor’s good name and reputation; when we are content with they way God has made us and with the life God has given us.

Yes, in “Lifting High the Cross,” we will use the Law to show sin and the need for our Savior. But, always, we remember that Christ did not come to condemn, but to save. So, living and loving and having our being in Christ, we live not to condemn with harsh criticism, but we seek to be Christ to our neighbor: sharing with them the Good News of the Gospel, and building them up and edifying with the strength, joy, and peace that only the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ can give. We have received mercy that we may live merciful lives.

Our prayer for this Sunday nicely summarizes for us what it means to live and hope in Christ who did not come to condemn, but to save:

“Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs

of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience.”

Amen.