

Lent 2            3/12/17  
John 3:1-17     A

**“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.”**

The Gospel in a nutshell. Familiar words; well-known to all of us. But, what I want to focus your attention on this morning is not merely the Gospel in a nutshell, but on the words of Jesus that follow it,

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.”

And then, Jesus continues with these words, “Whoever believes in Him is not condemned.” Simple words. Easy words to understand. Yet, how we struggle with them, doubting them; perhaps, not even believing them. I will propose two reasons why we struggle with these words and why some people do not believe these words of Jesus.

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’re never home anyway.”

The wife hears from her husband, “Why is this house such a mess? 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...! 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: time in the time-out chair, being cut from the team, 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.

But, Jesus says, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” God did not send His Son into the world to condemn, to scold, to rebuke, 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 that the Law gives us.

“The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ,” John writes (John 1:17).” God gave the Law through Moses. The Law commands us to be perfect. And, that same Law shows us that we are not perfect; that we have sinned in our thoughts, words, and deeds. 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.

“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 burden us with more commands; burden us with guilt and despair. 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 to save the world through Him.”

Jesus became a true man, and took all of your sins upon Himself, every single sin of thought, word, and deed. And, the very Son of God 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. How sweet the words of Scripture are, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Ro 8:1).

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. Find comfort and joy in these words of God,

“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin” (Rom. 4:7-8).

What a precious, sweet message is this for people like you and me, people who so often feel condemned.

In our Epistle lesson, Paul teaches us that Abraham was not justified by his works, but by his faith in Jesus. Paul writes, quoting the words of Moses from Genesis, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3).

In the new birth of our baptism, God the Holy Spirit works faith in us, so that we may believe those words of Jesus, that we are not condemned because of our sins, but we are saved in Him. We trust, rejoice, and find comfort in Jesus alone, just as Abraham did. And baptized into Christ, He dwells in us and we dwell in Him, and does His work through us.

Christ does His work through us, 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 exasperate their children with unrealistic expectations; when husbands love their wives as Christ has loved the Church and wives submit to their husbands; when we help our neighbor to improve and protect his possessions and income; when we defend our neighbor's good name and reputation; when we are content with the life and stuff God has given us.

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.

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. Amen.