

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 21 May 2017

Generous Love

Pray Pray that we would be open to recognise the wonderful generous nature of God particularly in his love and that we would be given the grace to respond in sharing that with others.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). John 3 esp 12-17.

Background John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in scripture. It has been learned by heart (admittedly in a multitude of versions) by millions of people and is seen as the epitome of God's love in Christ for the salvation of humanity. In our content as a congregation we are taking it to be a prime example of God's generous nature, love. Whereas we tend to limit our generosity, often along the lines of familiarity or deserving God's love is wide and open. We would do well to learn from that and seek his grace to be more generous and loving.
(We depart from the lectionary readings this week to focus on a stewardship themed service).

Possible questions/points to consider

1. There is always a danger when coming to a very familiar passage that we impose long held views and interpretations on the passage without allowing scripture to speak to us afresh. Some of the thoughts, even of verse 16, with which we are so accustomed would have come across as quite extraordinary to John's original readers. But then of course Jesus' death had come as a complete shock and mystery to so many. Let's begin with the idea "God so loved the world". There was widespread thinking that earthly things were tainted, if not exactly evil. It is worth remembering that God is interested in creation and in our stewardship of it. There are many congregations nowadays that recognise our obligation to God to care for our world. However, there are still Christians who regard "the world" as somehow evil or dirty. What differences would these (or other) views make to how we treat the world?
2. In the passage the primary sense of "world" would have been people – humanity. What does it say about the scope of God's love that he sent his Son to because he loved the **world** – not just the religious but people as a whole? What does this say about our deserving? Many times in my ministry people have said to me "But I'm not good enough to come to Church" "I'm not good enough for God". How do you respond to the thought "None of us are, but God loves us anyway"? Why we think that we need to qualify or earn God's acceptance? Why is it so hard to accept God's generous love?
3. Generous love is not just God's gift to us – it is intended for others too. Even if we get to the point of accepting God's generous love and recognise that we have done nothing to deserve it we can sometimes find it hard to be as open and accepting of others. Where have you had issues? Where has the Church struggled to be as generous in loving and accepting as God?
4. On Sunday we thought a bit about friends, what makes a good friend, what we look for and what a good friend might expect of us. Spend a few minutes reflecting on friends you have, how the friendships came about, what is important to you, perhaps any struggles you've had and (hopefully!) how these have been overcome. How do the traits seen in God such as generous love, acceptance and forgiveness point us in the direction of how we should treat a) our friends b) folks that we get on with and c) others including those who hold very different attitudes to us?
5. The concept of "where do I draw the line?" was mentioned. How does God's generous love call this approach into question?
6. Anything else that arises from the passage or the service?

Prayer Thank you Lord for your abundant generosity not least in the love which gave us your Son to be our Saviour. Help us to accept it with gratitude and do on to show generous love to you and to others by the way we live out of lives. Amen.