



Billboards, bumper stickers, street preachers – you name it – you’ve undoubtedly seen John 3:16 referenced with the suggestion that this is all you need to know and everything will be ok. Simple, really, or is it? Obviously, I don’t think our life as followers of Jesus Christ is quite this simple. It’s regularly dangerous to proof-text: to take something out of context.

Today, though, I ask us to consider the broader context of our Gospel passage. It’s more than one verse, so the people who put together our Revised Common Lectionary had something in mind when they asked us to read and ponder verses 14-21, not simply verse 16.

First, some background: our passage this morning is part of Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus. Nicodemus, a pharisee or learned person, came to Jesus at night. Jesus responds to Nicodemus’s question about who Jesus is and what he is doing

with telling Nicodemus that one must be born again and Nicodemus’s famous response of how is this possible. In Eugene Peterson’s The Message, the paraphrase for this question is enlightening:

Jesus said, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

“So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”(John 3:5-8)

Jesus then goes on to tell Nicodemus that he, Jesus, is the Son of God. That Jesus has come down from heaven to be an example to us of how to live, what to believe, how to determine what is God given and to strive to live in the light rather than the darkness.

Peterson then goes on with verses 16-21:

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an

Numbers 21:4-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21; Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

19-21 "This is the crisis we're in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won't come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is."

Whosoever believes in him shall live. Perhaps the word "trust" would make more sense to us. Many of us may find it hard to trust. To be vulnerable, especially if we have been betrayed or let down by someone we love. Perhaps this is just semantics, but for me, trust can be harder than belief. And maybe more so when to trust Jesus is to trust in one I have not seen, I cannot touch, I cannot speak with in person given that Jesus lived and died well before my time. Before our time.

What, then do we hang onto when making a decision to believe, to trust, in Jesus as the only Son of God? Yes, we can read the Bible. We can talk with others. We can pray, and sometimes hear an answer. At the end of the day, though, we step out in faith – trusting – that God exists, that God loves us and wants the best for us even as we continually mess up. And all because God loves us, and has loved us, from before the world existed.

The writer to the Ephesians reminds us that:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

What we are is not because of our own doing but rather because God, who is rich in mercy, offers us a way forward. A way forward living in the light of Jesus Christ. A way forward that cares for one another and for all creation. A way forward that seeks justice and mercy which too often are not the way of the world.

Our lives are given to us through the grace and gift of God. Our lives are intended to showcase the love that God has for us by living into a world that is broken and often in darkness. We can choose to live a life of light and love. We can choose to live a life that seeks to heal others as we have been healed through Jesus. We have a part to play in turning from darkness. In turning into the light. I invite you on this journey, with all its unknowns, with all its hardships and with all its joys. Believe in God. Trust in God. And all will be well. All will be well. Amen.