Vacation Bible School Sunday

Love, Loyalty, Life!

Vienna Presbyterian Church
Rev. David Jordan-Haas
John 3:16

July 12, 2015
Our single Bible verse this morning comes from a conversation that Jesus has with a really smart, religious man, Nicodemus. Jesus says to Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in God may not perish but have eternal life.”

I like how Dale Bruner translates the Bible’s most-often recited verse (26 words): “You see, God loved the world so much that God gave His one and only Son, so that every single person, whoever! Who is (simply) entrusting him/herself to God would never be destroyed, oh no! But would even now have a deep, lasting Life!”

Jesus talks to Nicodemus about three essential things, which I want to lift up today: Love, Loyalty, Life. Love, Loyalty, Life. First, Love. “God so LOVED the world that God gave His one-and-only Son....” Jesus tells Nicodemus that God – the Creator of all the stars and galaxies in Heaven – that this “out there” God loves us “down here.” Of all the things that you and I might say about God – our All-Knowing, All-Seeing, All-Powerful God – best of all, most of all, GOD is ALL-LOVING. The most perfect, exquisite description of our huge God is this, “God IS Love” (1 John 4:8).

God “so loved the world” has a double meaning here. Number one, God loves us with such a huge amount of love. God loves with a beyond-calculation, infinite amount of love! And, number two, the way God loves is huge. God loves us in the most ultimate “giving” way, the most “costly” way. God’s way of loving means giving up His very one-and-only Son to betrayal, to rejection, to death on a Cross (John Piper). Here’s how Paul puts the immense way God loves, in Romans 5:7-8: “We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put His love on the line for us by offering His Son in sacrificial death (on a Cross) while we were of no use whatever to God.” (THE MESSAGE)

There’s the story of a six-year-old child one morning watching her 90-year-old great-grandmother putting on a necklace with a cross on it. “I know what that is, Gigi,” the little girl said, “that’s the Cross that Jesus died on. Jesus has gone to Heaven but He’s left His Spirit with us to live in our hearts!” The Cross is costly love; but oh, so sweet.
There’s Love; Second, Loyalty. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in God....” I chose the word “loyalty” for this part of the Bible verse because of the cute three-part “Letter-L formula,” – Love, Loyalty, Life. But really, more than loyalty, Jesus is talking to Nicodemus about trusting God and believing in God. In fact, the word “believe” is the most-often used single word in the entire discourse between Nicodemus and Jesus.

Jesus is talking to Nicodemus about the kind of response to give to God for the costly, expensive way God has loved us. It’s like this: God “gave once and for all, for one and for all, God’s One and Only Son.” Therefore, our one right response would be to trust and believe in God. This ought to be our most grateful response to a God Who loves us in such an extravagant way. Trusting God is essential to God rescuing us from sin and death. Believing in God’s ultimate love for us is essential to His gift to us of a life ever-lasting.

Boys and girls, men and women, what does it take to believe in and trust God? God goes to the most intense length – His own Son’s death – to show us such Immense Love. Is this enough for you and for me to trust God with our very lives? Jesus’ invitation to Nicodemus is to believe (with all his heart and mind) that God – Jesus Himself – IS the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, the Mighty Rock. Similarly, for us, this is about believing in a God Who can bring relief to a troubled heart, Who can comfort the grieving, Who can feed a hungry soul, Who can heal an inner pain or physical hurt.

There’s Love, Loyalty; Third, Life. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in God may not perish but have eternal life.”

Deep, lasting Life is Christ’s aim for us. Jesus says, “I came that they might have life, and that they might have it abundantly” (John 10:10). God loves you so much that God wants you to have a life that lasts longer than a lifetime! God loves you and wants you to have this ever-lasting Life – to know it, to enjoy it, and to share it with others! “I am the Vine,” Jesus says, “you are the branches” (John 15:5). Jesus desires us to be “attached and connected” to Him, like the way a branch is attached and connected to the vine. Like the Vine is the “life source” for its branches – ALL energy and nutrients flowing from the vine...
into its branches, so Christ is our “life source” flowing into us with eternal life.

More than any other phrase in John’s Gospel, Jesus uses most often the phrase “eternal life” – 17 times. Rarely does Jesus mention the word “Life” by itself. Most of the time Jesus uses both words together, “eternal” and “life”, in the present tense. Why? Because for Jesus the ultimate gift of His Love (on the Cross) makes the gift of Eternal Life a right-here-and-now, always-available proposition. Jesus’ gift of Eternal Life is not (only) some future, distant blissful state! (Bruner). The gift of believing in Jesus, and trusting Him, becomes the gift of having Eternal Life now. It’s like the very immediate, natural, continuous act of breathing. If we have Christ (in us), we have Christ’s life right now – it’s immediate, continuous, abundant, eternal (John Piper).

Love, Loyalty, Life. Jesus so much wants Nicodemus to know about the deep, lasting life Jesus intends for him. Jesus so much wants you and me to know about the deep, lasting life He intends for us. So what does this eternal life look like? How lasting is it? A pastor once described it like this: if a little bird, once every 1,000 years, took up in its beak a single grain of sand, and flew from the coast of the sea to a great plain of land and there laid down that single grain of sand; when those grains of sand – one upon the other and another – when those grains of sand became a mound of sand, which became the height of Mount Everest, THEN eternity will have just begun! (Jerry Healy)

“Lord Jesus, I see you in Your Word today. When You are talking to Nicodemus it’s like You are talking to me. I will no longer resist you. I trust you with my soul and my body. I believe in Your promise that whoever believes in You will not die but have deep, lasting life. I receive Your gift of eternal life. I thank You, Jesus. We thank You Jesus. I love You. We love You, Jesus. Amen.”