

From Our Conference Minister



God Still Loves the World! (John 3:14-21)

*"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace..."*

These tender words from Sonnet 43 written by poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) is a great choice for a special reading at weddings because it reflects the sentiment of intense human love. Human love can also reflect divine love.

What does this love look like in everyday life? Perhaps an illustration might be helpful.

A story is told about a bedtime conversation between a father and his six-year-old son, Benjamin. Upset that his father was putting him to bed earlier than he wanted to go, Benjamin said, "Daddy, I hate you." Benjamin's father, exercising parental wisdom replied, "Ben, I'm sorry you feel that way, but I love you." Benjamin responded, "Don't say that!" His father replied, "I'm sorry Benjamin, but it's true. I love you." "Don't," his son protested, "don't say that again!" At which point Ben's father, remembering the words of a sermon about John 3:16 said, "Benjamin, I love you... *like it or not!*" God's love is like that, unconditional and steadfast.

John 3:16 has been called the greatest verse in the Bible:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

It is taught in Sunday school and quoted often in sermons. Banners with this bible verse can be seen draped over guardrails in sport stadiums and painted on faces during major games.

The expanse of God's love is recounted in this well-known verse. In John's gospel "the world" frequently refers to that dimension of human life that is antagonistic toward the things of God. In spite of this, the gospel writer insists that God loves the world, and seeks to draw people out of transgressions using God's steadfast love.

As familiar as we are with this scripture, I wonder how many of us believe that God truly loves us? Sometimes the crises in our lives, in the church or the world can erode our belief in God's love for us.

As we continue to journey together through Lent, may we reflect God's divine love to each other and to the world that God still loves! Amen.

Lenten Blessings,

Monica

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