

John 3: 16-18

**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.  
Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world,  
but in order that the world might be saved through him.  
Those who believe in him are not condemned;  
but those who do not believe are condemned already,  
because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.**

**Meditation:**

**Every time this reading comes up in the cycle of Sunday readings,  
I think to myself: I'm not going to use it...I'm not going to read it...**

**Why not you might be wondering?  
Because this reading is often used to intimidate and scare people into becoming  
Christians....**

**I have such a really hard time that!  
Fear and intimidation have no role in the teachings of Christ...  
and are counterproductive in our lives.**

**Fear and intimidation do not lead to transformation  
and they are certainly not the Good News!**

**A number of years ago,  
I had a heart and mind opening experience in which  
I came to understand: mentally, emotionally and spiritually,**

that guilt and fear are belong to the realm of the ego  
and are not part of the Divine...

From that point forward, I refused...no it wasn't so much a refusing to use fear and guilt  
but rather it was no longer even an option...

it doesn't show up on my radar screen...

I don't even think about using guilt or fear to convince anyone  
about the Good News of Jesus

So, why do I keep reading it?...

Well...primarily because I keep seeing signs that say:

John 3:16 (that's our reading today)

Have you ever seen a guy holding a poster with John 3:16 written on it?

He or she is stands behind the goal post at football games so that  
the television cameras catch it...

and every time I'm driving north on Rt. 83 in Lemont, I see John 3:16 verse on a large  
highway billboard...

agghhhh....

Why are these verses are so public?

I honestly believe that the people who pay money for the billboard,  
and the person who buys that seat in the stadium believe they are preaching  
the Good News...that they are trying to save souls...

but...but....that version of having to believe in Jesus or else is not, I would offer,  
the Good News of Jesus the Christ...

So, why are they even in Scripture?

Well...briefly...we have to remember that Bible isn't an historical document  
or for that matter, a science textbook

but it is the faithful remembering of a group of people who struggled with

**knowing who God is, who Jesus was...and who they were as his followers...  
in their time and place.**

**Now, because we hold these Scriptures as Sacred and inspired,  
we say they have relevance and wisdom for us, even 2,000 years later...  
and I believe most of them do!**

**But taking many verses literally, understanding them in our own time and place,  
through the lens of our modern life with all of its understandings, prejudices and biases...  
sometimes contradicts the good news that Jesus gave his life for:  
the unconditional, unboundaried, unlimited Love of God....  
and the invitation to know that love for ourselves  
and the call to offer that love through our lives...**

**Ok...with all that being said, what is going on with today's reading?**

**When John's Gospel was written around the year 100, the people in his community  
were being blamed by the Romans for the decline of the Empire so they were literally  
being fed to the lions....  
and they were being kicked out of the synagogue by their Jewish companions  
because they were no longer seen as Jewish considering their belief in Jesus the Christ...**

**So, for them life was beyond difficult.**

**The author of John was trying to keep his community together  
and he went on the offensive...**

**either you in or your out...**

**either you are saved or you are not...**

**either you believe in Jesus...**

**or you are condemned...**

**But ...that's not the teachings of Jesus...**

**He never used fear to pressure people into following him...**

**He always invited people to follow him...**

**As a matter of fact, it wasn't so much about being one his followers...**

**He didn't need the thousands who came to him to healed and fed  
to follow him...**

**he wanted them to pass on the gifts that they were given:**

**Jesus was much more focused how well do your love your neighbor?**

**the one who is hungry and cold..**

**the one who is sick and lonely...**

**the one who is being oppressed and left out....**

**A theology based on fear and intimidation is not the theology of Jesus the Christ  
and will not be not ours...**

**We will not be concerned about the numbers who fill our churches,  
but the numbers who are in despair and feel lost...**

**We will not be concerned if you commit to be his follower,  
but we will hope that you live your life in and for love....**

**Jesus was not into building walls or buildings...**

**but he was certainly all about breaking down walls and  
crossing borders to bring the compassionate love of God into peoples lives....  
and that too is what we are about...**

**Love is the only reason to follow Jesus,  
it is the only force that can heal divisiveness and dispel fear...**

**but if you choose not to follow him...that's ok...**

**then may I invite you still to love your neighbor as yourself  
and thus show the Love of God....**

**May I invite you to allow your neighborhood to include all people,  
as a matter of fact: all of creation...human and nonhuman alike...**

**May I invite you to allow forgiveness, kindness, compassion and generosity  
to be the ways that let your love shine...**

**Because if You do, I will suggest that you will find yourself  
in the reign of heaven on Earth...  
and then you will find plenty of reasons to say, thank you! amen!**