

A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent

A Gospel passage like today's is an absolute gift to the Preacher – what richer text could you be offered than John 3:16? But it also means that you have to try and say something about it that hasn't been done to death. I'll try to do my best ...

This passage is significant to me because it tells us what has motivated God. People are motivated by all sorts of things, and all kinds of emotion. Sometimes we're motivated by logic, sometimes it's instinct, sometimes our motivations may even be completely illogical or almost feel inexplicable. So ... what motivated God?

Love. God so loved the world ...

God became incarnate as the Son as an act of love for humanity. And God did this loving act because God wanted humanity to live. And when it says that we may have 'eternal life', I like to think that yes, it means our redemption and ultimate salvation, and our being brought into the Kingdom of Heaven, but it also means our flourishing here and now. Because through our encountering Jesus, through our connection to God, we learn something that is beyond price – how to live well, and how to ensure we live in such a way that not only do we flourish, but those around us do too.

The following verse is a little reframing of what has already been said, just in case we needed to hear this lesson in a slightly different way. "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world ..." Some people may perceive God as a figure who is vengeful, who is judgemental, or who enacts retribution. Such an image has motivated people to behave for the longest time, and this image still works powerfully, and it arguably still will into the future, given human nature and our desire to avoid punishment ... but ... God does not want to condemn the world. God wants to save it. And that means we need to be taught some very important lessons ...

One of the lessons that we can learn is about the nature of grace. Paul explains in the letter to the Romans that it is not our works, our actions, which redeem us. Our faith is what matters, and our understanding of the nature of God. God promises redemption, and what seals the deal is not our actions, but God's faithfulness to us. Paul says, "for this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace".

From this we learn yet more about the nature of God. God is gracious to us. We cannot earn our redemption through our own actions, but we receive salvation from God as a freely given act of benevolence and love. In this is grace.

During this season of Lent, when we are called to contemplate ourselves, and to confront ourselves with those things within us that need changing in order for us to flourish, how comforting it is to know that God loves us, and is gracious to us, even though we fall short. And the truth is that we all do. We are imperfect, each and every one of us. But there is divine grace that meets our imperfection with infinite compassion. Thanks be to God.

My prayer for us all is that we will embrace the grace that we have been given. That we will respond with love and thanksgiving, and then pay it forward. Because God has been generous to us, let us treat others with generosity. Because God has been compassionate to us, let us be people of compassion. This is how we demonstrate our understanding of just how precious a gift we have been given – from God, in Christ, and without our meriting it. And it is both a life-giving, and life-long task.

One of the other, wonderful, lessons we may learn from our annual observation of Lent is that we all need to take time to stop, reflect, and learn. Such a spiritual discipline is never wasted, and the work can be surprisingly fruitful. There is always something we can do for ourselves, and others, to better reflect the love that we have received from God. We should never consider this work complete, and we can revel in the fact that we have each day as an opportunity to show what we believe, through our words and actions, and to base them all in the infinite love of God.

Rev. Dr Emily Fraser
All Saints, South Hobart and St Raphael's, Fern Tree
The Second Sunday in Lent
1 March 2026