

## Sermon Sunday 14 March

### Numbers 21:4-9 John 3:14-21

John begins by referring to the rather strange story we heard told in Numbers. He takes that story and used it as a kind of parable of Jesus. The serpent was lifted up, the men looked at it, their thoughts became focused on him and so we find eternal life.

We then come to the verse which must one of the most well-known verses in the Bible; a verse which really is the essence of the gospel. *'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'* If one verse could sum up the gospel, this is it.

*'For God so loved the world'*. In these few words we see God from a slightly different perspective than what we do in the Old Testament, where God is seen as attempting to bring his people to heel, as a loving parent often has to. God had a challenge on his hands as the Israelites were constantly disobeying him.

This was especially the case during their time of wandering in the desert. At one stage, he got fed up with their ungratefulness and unleashed his wrath upon them. *'But while they were still eating the meat, the anger of the Lord blazed against the people, and he caused a severe plague to break out amongst them.'* Numbers 11:33. Incidents of the Israelites incurring the wrath of God crop up quite frequently in the Old Testament.

This text (For God so loved the world), shows God, not acting to bring a universe to heel, but rather to satisfy his love. He loves each and every one of us, and he wants us to love him back. He wants us on his side. And when you think about it, the most effective way of getting someone on your side, is to love them. Love is hard to refuse.

*'...that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.'* So how does God convey to us this love? How does he make it abundantly clear to us just what this love looks like? What better way than have someone just like us demonstrate and teach just what this love looks like in our everyday lives. And so he has this brilliant idea – 'I will reproduce myself in human form. Surely, they can't help but relate to me if I am just like them.' And so we have the person of Jesus. And the reward for accepting and believing in Jesus is a fulfilling life and an everlasting life. You can't ask for more than that. That basically is the jackpot. Let me tell you a story.

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art. When the Viet Nam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art. The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this."

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so

drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. "Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift."

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection. On the platform sat the painting of the son.

The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?"

There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one."

But the auctioneer persisted, "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?" Another voice shouted angrily, "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids! "But still the auctioneer continued, "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?"

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

"We have \$10, who will bid \$20?" "Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters." "\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?" The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!

A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!" The auctioneer laid down his gavel, "I'm sorry, the auction is over."

"What about the paintings?"

"I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

God gave his Son 2,000 years ago to die on a cruel cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is, "The Son, the Son, who'll take the Son?" Because you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything.

A few days ago I was speaking to someone who is facing a few challenges in her life. She said, 'How lucky we are to have a faith. It really does bring meaning into our lives and helps us to deal with those inevitable challenges we face in life.' What more can I say?

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