

Developing Our Global Awareness  
John 3:16- 21

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*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. Jn. 3:16*

Jesus one day had a conversation with a young man. After the young man had spoken for a while, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mk. 12:34).

Once when I was a young pastor in the Belvidere church I had a conversation with an older woman and I wanted to say to her, “You are far from the kingdom of God!” I didn’t because I didn’t have the courage. But I wanted to say to her, “You are far from the kingdom of God!” The situation was this. She came to the church one weekday morning with her offering envelope. I don’t fault her for that because there were extenuating circumstances with her husband’s health that kept her from attending worship. What irked me was the fact that she handed over the offering and said, “Be sure that none of it goes to missionaries! I hate missionaries!” If I had the guts I would have said right then, “You are far from the kingdom of God!” Those who are close to God have a global awareness and seek to develop it more and more.

That is our theme for this World Communion Sunday and I want to gather our thoughts around what could be the most well-known verse in the Bible: John 3:16: “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.” A verse like that supplies us with the idea that, if we are going to be close to God in our attitudes and like God in our activities, we have to have a global awareness and cannot remain locally or nationally focused.

*If you are going to be close God, you have to look to the whole world.*

I am sure you are aware that, if you want to connect with someone on a personal level, you have to know something of their interests. Relating to one of our granddaughters has meant that I learn something about “Paw Patrol,” “Daniel Tiger,” and ballerinas; and relating to the other has meant that I learn something about mermaids, the “mighty, mighty Dragons,” and now a character named “Owlette.” As for our sons-in-law, they are no different. To connect with the one I need to show interest in his Scottish heritage, various subjects of church history, and classic horror movies; and to connect with the other I have to be able to think about literature, detective fiction, and birding.

You know people, too, I am sure, who call upon you in much the same way. To be in any way close to them you need to show interest in farming or football or some other such subject about which they care deeply.

If you are going to be close to God, then you have to show interest in the world. God has a profound global interest and is always thinking about the world. That global interest is essential to who God is.

Study God's interest in the world by way of the Gospel According to John. Today's famous text begins, "For God so loved the world." That is just one reference to the world in John. There are scores more. By my count there are almost 80 instances in John where the word *world* appears. That is quadruple the number of appearances of the word in the other three Gospels combined. John wants us to know that God is supremely interested in the world and this global interest is integral to who God is.

Now, of course, God is interested in matters personal and local. Neither John nor I want to take any of that away. But if you confine God to that, then something of God's fullness is missed. The Hebrews on their march out of Egypt in the exodus had to meet God outside their camp; they knew their little camp could not hold God (Ex. 19:17). And Isaiah, when he was in the magnificent temple one day, had a vision of God, you may remember. God, Isaiah discovered, was so full of splendor that just the hem of God's robe filled the whole temple (Is. 6:1). Nothing localized, though it may be big to us, can hold the fullness of the character and wonder of God. God is fully here – certainly! – but here is not the fullness of God. To know and be close to God you have to look with interest to the world.

*If you are going to be like God, you have to give your best to the world.*

John 3:16 has it that God's love for the world issues in God's gift to the world, and God's gift to the world is God's own Son, God's nearest and dearest. This is the heart of the heart of the gospel, the essence of Christianity. The Christian truth that gives rise to Christian values and Christian attitudes is the gracious, marvelous, splendid, and sacrificial gift of God's own Son to the world.

Centuries ago, somewhere in Europe, two medical men happened upon a derelict passed out in the street. They said to one another, in Latin, the language of the scholars, "Let us experiment on this vile fellow." What the two medical men did not know was that the man in the gutter was a down-and-out scholar who knew Latin. He had heard and understood the two doctors and responded, "You would call 'vile' one for whom Christ was not ashamed to die?"

There is not a single refugee, there is not a single immigrant, there is not a single person in wretched poverty that God did not so love that he gave his only Son. Those with eyes of faith have a global awareness and see, whenever the news shows a crying immigrant child or refugee mother, Christ kneeling beside that one and saying,

I felt every teardrop  
When in darkness you cried  
And I strove to remind you  
That for those tears I died.<sup>1</sup>

God's best gift is not too good or too much for anyone. God lavishes the best of God's love on the least, regardless of nationality or ethnicity or color or any such thing.

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<sup>1</sup> Marsha Stevens, "For Those Tears I Died."

We simply cannot remain narrowly local and nationalistic and still be true to God. We can't look upon the vast suffering throughout the world and think we have nothing to do with it and remain satisfied Christians. If you are going to be close to God, you have to look to the world; if you are going to be like God, as God wants you to be, you have to give your best to the world.

*If you are going to be like God, you have to want the best for the world.*

The chief inspiration for giving the best to someone is wanting the best for them. John 3:16 says that the purpose behind God's loving gift of the only Son was so that everyone might have eternal life. Dr. Blackwood, who made a specialty of the Gospel According to John in his teaching of preaching at Princeton Seminary and then Temple University, defined John's use of the term *life* to mean "all that God wishes for His children here and hereafter."<sup>2</sup> God gives the best to the world because God wants the best for the world.

Love, if it is truly love, always desires the best for the beloved. Note preposition! Love does not desire the best *from* the beloved; rather love desires the best *for* the beloved.

When we come to grips with a thought like that in terms of our subject for today we soon see that our interest in other nations cannot be for the sake of what we can gain from them, but for the sake of what can be given to them for their well-being. In the much overworked phrase in the news this last week, love has no *quid pro quo*. Love gives without thought of return. Other nations are not warehouses full of natural resources for us to exploit, cheap labor for us to take advantage of, or markets we can sell goods to. They are lands filled with the children of God whom God loves and for whom God wants the best: the best health, the best security, the best livelihood, the best happiness, and the best respect; and it is ours, under God, to help them have it.

We come to World Communion Sunday today as sit as one people, the whole globe of us, regardless of color or language or background or nationality. We sit together as one people around the one table of the one God who loves the best, gives the best, and wants everyone to have the best. We sit as one people around the one table of the one God who loves each one of us the best and who wishes each one to love others more. In the name of this God, let us grow in our global awareness and our global response in a global mission.

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Watterson Blackwood, Sr. Collection. Special Collections, Princeton Theological Seminary Library. Box 2: John's Gospel, "Life = John's Gospel," p. 2.