

Pastor Matthew Ude
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John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Miraculous Mission: Jesus Saves the World

The theme of our VBS this week was Miraculous Mission: Jesus Saves the World. Meanwhile all week long the news has been talking about another mission, another mission that many would consider miraculous. The first moon landing happened exactly fifty years ago yesterday.

Those of you who are fifty-five or older probably vividly remember that event. It was an almost unbelievable feat of engineering. If you want to drive to Texas you get in your car and go, you can easily navigate all by yourself. To get men to the moon it took something like 400,000 engineers, scientists and technicians. It was indeed an astounding accomplishment. And those of you old enough to remember it probably remember it as astounding. However for many of us born later it is simply a piece of history. We grew up knowing it happened and have a tendency to take it for granted.

Unfortunately we often have the same attitude towards the miraculous mission the Jesus undertook to save the world. Unfortunately we often have the same attitude towards John 3:16. We have heard it so often we take it for granted.

We could use the example of a marriage. Two people fall in love. At first everything is amazing. Before they were sad and lonely and now they have found someone who loves them and is willing to put up with them. At first it doesn't really matter if he is a bit of a slob or if she is a little bit bossy, because they are just so happy to have someone. Then the relationship goes on a little bit. They get used to having someone. They forget what it was like to be lonely. Now that they start taking the good things for granted suddenly the little things bug them more. They start taking what they do have for granted they want more.

In just such a way many Christians act. Many of us forget or never knew what it was like to not live in God's forgiveness. We forget and take Christ and what he did for granted. We take it for granted and suddenly instead of rejoicing in what we have we complain about what we don't have.

Through our study of John 3:16 today we want to renew our wonder in the miraculous mission Jesus undertook for us.

One of the things the news talked about this week was how much a moon rock was worth. NASA brought down a total of 842 lbs of moon rocks. These rocks are worth a lot of money. One moon rock weighing 200 mg which is .0004 lbs sold for half a million dollars recently. If we saw it, it would probably look like just a rock. But those who know how to "dig into" and study it can learn a wealth of information from these rocks.

This is doubly true about our passage for the week. We take it for granted. Oh yeah God so loved the world. But if we learn how to dig into it, we find a wealth of information that makes it far more valuable to us than even a moon rock.

We could easily give a whole sermon to each world in this passage. But we will stick to three and keep it to a few minutes each. Let us pray that through this study we will learn to appreciate just how miraculous Christ's mission to save us truly is.

God

We could use many words to describe God. And in fact Pieper does use many many words. Here you see the section on "the nature of God" in his dogmatic book. it's over 100 pages long. And that is really just the beginning.

We could use words like, "omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, " which describe his knowledge, power and size. We could use words like homoousius and genus majesticum, which seek to describe how Jesus is both God and man. We could use words like Misericordia which you may have noticed on the front of the bulletin after Easter.

But even after using all these words we would only get a small hint at who God really is. And we would probably be really confused too.

But God presents Himself to us in a different way. Rather than trying to describe Himself He simply tells us all the things He has done for us. Thus we learn to know Him in His relationship to us. And even the littlest and simplest among us can get to know him. I would never try to teach 2nd graders what "genus majesticum" means, but nearly every one of the kids at our VBS can tell you how Jesus was born as a little baby.

The first two stories we learned this week right away teach us the two most important things about God. First we had the story of creation. This teaches us God's great power. Second we learned how God promised to give Abraham a child. Even though Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 91, yet God did what He promised. Thus we learned that God keeps His promises.

These two truths are reflected in the names God uses for himself. The two most important are 1. God which means the almighty and 2. Jehovah (Jevah) which means "the God who keeps his promises."

This is whom we are talking about when we say God, the one who is bigger than the universe, yet will never forget us or the promises he has made to us.

This is part of what makes His mission so miraculous. That He who created all things and stands above the heavens came down for us.

So

Notice how John stresses "so ." God so loved the world. We often skip right to the word "loved." But that word "so" is very important. That word "so" means that God didn't just say He loved us, but put His "money where His mouth is." When it came down to it, He gave up the thing that was most important to Him for us.

It is easy to say, "I love you." It is much harder to get up at 3am and say to your spouse, you go back to sleep I'll take care of the crying baby. It is easy to say, "my family comes first." It is hard to skip your big fishing trip so you can watch barney and read the same Dr Seuss book for the 1,000th time. It is easy to say "love," it is harder to put their happiness above your own.

When John says, "God **so** loved" he tells us that God did something very difficult because of His love for us. If I say to you, "I worked so hard . . ." or "I'm so tired . . ." you know that I'm about to give you an example illustrating just how tired I am.

What is it that would be hard for God? What is it that would actually demonstrate His love for us. He created light and matter and all the stars in the sky simply by speaking, and in only six days. No work of power would really demonstrate His love, but to give up his only Son. In this way God loved the world. To this degree God loved the world.

This was an act of supreme love and an act of supreme sacrifice. That Jesus gave up everything to come and suffer and die. That he was willing to truly suffer. And here we see that world "so" again. It wasn't a farce. It wasn't acting. It wasn't pretend.

It might be easy to think, "well he was God," but no Jesus did it as a man. Jesus truly suffered. He truly was tempted, for He "so" loved us.

This is what make it miraculous. What make the moon landing so miraculous is how difficult it was and the power of the rocket as it blasted off. What makes Jesus mission so miraculous is that he didn't use His power, that He laid the use of it aside, that he accepted birth, suffering, and death.

"not perish"

If God came to save the world that implies that it needed saving. If God came to save the world there was something seriously wrong with it. If through faith in Christ we "should not perish," that implies that before faith we were perishing.

Here we can make another comparison to marriage. If you have two people who think very highly of themselves, and we see this all the time in celebrity marriages, that isn't going to make a very good marriage. But if instead you have two people who both think, "I'm pretty ugly. I'm pretty cranky. I'm not really that great of a spouse. I'm really grateful that this person is willing to put up with me." Then you will have a good marriage. Then they will appreciate their spouse.

So to here, we so often don't appreciate God's love for us, because we aren't willing to admit what a terrible person I really am. We think people are usually pretty good. Maybe the really evil people like Stalin and Hitler deserve punishment but the rest of us are ok. God says no, even the best among you deserve death. Even people like Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and Clara Barton deserve death.

You know it is easy to find a church that talks about how God loves you. But find a church that confronts you with your sin. A church that tells us fornication is wrong. Divorce is wrong. That not only says it but confronts you with it. There is a church that is true to Christ and His word. God wants the church to do this because He loves you and doesn't want you to die in your sin.

This is what this word of God confronts us with. There is nothing pretty or worthy in you. You are a sinner. You deserve eternal punishment. You do not deserve mercy. You do not deserve for God to listen to you.

This is what makes Christ Mission Miraculous, that He did it even from sinners like you and me.

This is Christ's Miraculous mission, that He who was greater than all became a child, that His love was so great that it lead him to endure suffering and death, and that He did it not for those who are deserving but for those who are terrible sinners. "A miraculous mission to save you and me."

Amen