

Sunday 1st March 2026: Lent 2. Benefice BCP Holy Communion, Stonegrave

We have just said in our Creed. “ I believe in God...”

Do you?

Lets hold that question there for a while.

Earlier this week I was overjoyed to see 10 people join me for the first of my Lent Course sessions looking at the ancient practise of ‘lectio divina.’, which literally means ‘sacred reading’, not a Bible study but a prayerful exploration of Scripture using the heart and not the head. The formula for lectio divina is, read, meditate, pray, contemplate. You read the verse or passage, describe what it says to you (mediate), pray for the Holy Spirit to open your heart and encounter Jesus, then contemplate, go to where the Holy Spirit takes you.

Today’s passage is one that would be perfect for lectio divina, especially the verse, “*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.*”

Do you believe...?

For many, this probably is the most famous verse in the Bible. Here we have the Gospel, in a sentence, so simple, but says so much; memorized by Christians for generations, preached on by many, and known the world over. This verse has been translated into more languages than any other sentence.

The evangelist Max Lucado said of it,

*“John 3:16 is a twenty-six-word parade of hope: beginning with God, ending with life, and urging us to do the same.*

*Brief enough to write on a napkin or memorize in a moment, yet solid enough to weather two thousand years of storms and questions. If you know nothing of the Bible, start here. If you know everything in the Bible, return here. We all need the reminder. The heart of the human problem is the heart of the human. And God's treatment is prescribed in John 3:16. He loves. He gave. We believe. We live."*

Do you believe...?

More than any other perhaps, this verse should be inscribed on our hearts, should be read, meditated on, prayed over, and contemplated on, because within it are all the answered prayers, where all meditation should lead us and where Jesus meet us in contemplation. It is the verse that begins our Christian journey and provides direction all along the way through life.

In the style of Lectio divina, I would like to meditate with you on two words from the verse. Firstly, the word, 'For' which it begins with, *"For God so loved the world."*

It's not the usual typical way to start a sentence, is it? We would probably use the word 'therefore' because when we start a sentence this way, it helps to explain the previous sentence. So, if we really want to learn something about a sentence that starts with "for," or "therefore", we will need to study the previous sentence as well. In this case, that means that we'll look at John 3:14-15, verses which are much less well-known. In these verses, Jesus says:

*"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."*

The Son of Man must be lifted up, Jesus says. Why? Because God so loved the world that he gave his only son. The sentence before John 3:16 helps us to understand what it means that God gives His only son. allows His son to be lifted up, on the cross, for us. That is the measure of His love for us.

That is what Jesus tells Nicodemus, even though he is perplexed, and did not fully understand all of this until after Jesus was crucified; when he helped Joseph of Arimathea take Jesus' body down from the cross and place it in the tomb. He understood then.

Isn't that true for us? We don't fully understand the measure of God's love for us until we go to the cross and embrace the awe-inspiring mystery that Jesus died on the cross not only for the world, but for you, and for me.

The second word I want to consider with you today, is: 'believe.', "*Everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*"

The crucial thing here is that 'believe' is a verb, something that we do, not something that we have. In John's Gospel, 'believe' is always a verb, never a noun. To believe is not like an insurance policy that we have in a safe place until we need it but is something that we do. John 3:16 tells us that everyone who believes in Jesus is promised eternal life, but eternal life doesn't begin when we die, it begins when we believe, and when we believe we become who we are and the doing becomes the being.

Eternal life is simply a way of describing our being in a relationship with the one who created life, and who promises eternity to all who believe. Whether our world

knows it or not, this is what it hungers for: Eternal life. And it is our task to tell the world, to remind everyone, through our words and our actions, that God so loves them, that He gave them His only Son, so that they, too, might come to believe, and by believing have their life changed forever and become who they are, made in the image of God and loved with an eternal love that is beyond understanding.

Do you believe...?

Thanks be to God. Amen