

**Summerland United Church**  
**March 10th**  
**Lent 4: What are you *Up To?* “*Light Up*”**

**Stepping up to the Threshold**

John 3:16 is probably one of the most infamous and oft-quoted scriptures in the Bible. What follows that verse is important for our Lenten journey. God did not send Jesus to condemn the world, but to offer it saving light. As believers in that light, we are called to be those who will continue to light up the world through our lives so that the world might see the hope it yearns for.

**The Word Uplifts:** A reading from the book of John 3:14-21. Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth, metaphor, or story. Receive the meaning it has for you on this day.

And 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. “For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

One: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

**Reflection: Light Up**

This passage – ya know – I’m just going to say it. I don’t like this passage. It is beautiful and could be and should be a cornerstone of our faith, but it has been weaponized by some interpretations to be one of the most triggering and trauma-inducing passages in the bible.

There are a number of Christian denominations that misuse and abuse this passage – using it as justification for acting in a way that is completely contradictory to the message of the passage. They use John 3:16 to argue that Christianity and Jesus are the only – the only true, right and good religion in the world. They use John 3:16 to demand that everyone on the planet, not only be Christian, but their interpretation of Christian. Which tends towards a very narrow view on what that means. Because,

paradoxically, everyone should be Christian, but not everyone is good enough to be Christian. If you're gay, or Trans-gender, or non-binary, or a lesbian, or asexual or a person of colour, or in anyway a part of a marginalized community – you're not good enough, unless you change.

And this is because, it would seem people who use John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, God sent his Son for the sake of the world – as a weapon for their narrow Christianity – completely leave out John 3:17 - Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

God did not send the Son to condemn the world! But that's exactly what the weaponized use of John 3:16 does. And if the world is to be saved through him – through Jesus – then we need to take a look at how Jesus lives his life and live like him too.

So how does Jesus live? Does he wander around commanding everyone to believe exactly 1 way and 1 way only? Nope, he commands us to love one another. Love each other and in particular to love those on the margins. In Jesus' society, the social outcasts were those with visible illnesses, disabilities, widows, orphans and the poor.

These were the people who were stripped of their basic human rights to live as human beings.

So who are we doing that to today? Who, would it seem are having basic human rights being stripped from them and who continue to fight to have them in the first place?

In Alberta and other provinces across the country, Transgender and non-binary children and youth are being denied their identity. Systematic racism in Canada continues to impose limits and barriers on people of colour and indigenous Canadians.

And right here in town, we've seen racism on walls and attempts to share love torn down from our own building.

We might be tempted to interpret John 3:17 – the words – save the world through him – as a statement meaning everyone needs to be Christian to be saved. That's certainly how it's been interpreted in the past and currently in other denominations of Christianity.

But again, Jesus never tells anyone to be like him and believe like him. He does say – follow me, act in these ways –when he meets with the Samaritan woman at the well,

heals the centurion, heals the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, all of whom are not Jewish, Jesus doesn't say – I'll heal you after you convert to my faith.

No, he just heals. He feeds the hungry, touches the untouchables, speaks with the lonely, supports the poor, and doesn't ask anyone to believe or be different than who they all already are.

Because to follow Jesus, to act like Jesus– is to bring light into the world. And we do that with love. It can get pretty trite sounds – just love. Live, laugh love. Love makes the world go round. For God so loved the world.

For God so loved the world. God sends the Son to the world to show us pure unadulterated love. Love your neighbour as yourself. Love your enemy as yourself.

If we are to save the world through Jesus we need to do and act in the ways he does.

*And then those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.*

This flag is called the Progress Pride Flag – because it includes the rainbow for 2sLGBTQIA+ and this triangle. With stripes of black and brown to represent marginalized LGBTIQ+ people of color and the triad of blue, pink, and white from the trans flag, the design represents diversity and inclusion.

March 14<sup>th</sup> is called Pie Day. If you're a math geek you know it's because March 14 – is 3.14 the mathematical Pi.

However, in the united church, we call it PIE day – public, intentional and explicit inclusion of BIPOC and the Queer Community. When I first read the scripture for today I was troubled because John 3:16 has been such a weapon against such inclusion. Yet as I was thinking about it, the happier I became because this is our opportunity as a Christian community that practices such inclusion to reclaim this passage. To own it for what it truly means, which is at the very heart of our faith – that God loves us. God loves the world – everyone exactly as they are, with no exception. And we are called to live our lives with such light and that's how we Light up the world.