

INTO THE LIGHT
[written in oral form]

John 3:14-21
Lent 4, year B

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I first discovered John 3:16 while watching a football game.
Someone in the end zone seats held up a sign with John 3:16 on it.
look it up.

So, I thought I must

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I am kidding.

Those signs never made sense to me.  
I suppose it was meant for the un-churched, yet I doubt that demographic had a ready Bible at home... or... they may not even know it was a Bible verse. ??

Perhaps, the sign is just a happy reminder for Christians. ??  
In that case, I appreciate the reminder.

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John 3:16 is one of the pillars of Christianity. It ranks up there with Psalm 23.
We all know the verse and likely familiar with the whole section.

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Today's text is 3:14-21. This is a broad Johannine statement.  
It is after the Nicodemus exchange.  
Jesus presented how his message from God is so different and life changing.

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Verse 14 refers to the incident from Numbers 21 where Moses put a bronze snake on a pole.
Everyone who looked at it was healed. Remember this reference to God's corrective action.
This is God interceding... and bringing healing.

Jesus is God interceding, restoring, correcting and bringing healing.
This is God, through Jesus, reaching out to heal what is broken and what is destructive. It is a
correction for wholeness.
This is much like curing cancer, yet ontological and spiritual.

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*This would have been the Sunday that we would offer prayers and anointing for healing.  
We cannot do that because of the pandemic.  
However, please contact a minister if you like prayers for healing.*

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Back to the text:
I did a word study on this passage, which was most insightful.

The phrase about Jesus being lifted up does not refer to the cross. It is best understood as
one who was bent down standing up.

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Believing in Jesus is also a critical component to this section.  
Believing is accepting and living the message and way of Christ. This is God's way, and grace is at the heart of it.

Grace, not appeasement or threat, but Grace.

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The wonderful John 3:16.....oh, it should always be combined with verse 17. John 3:16 and 17:

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.

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.

For God SO loved..... God loves...

God gave..... to everyone.... a way out / a better way.

The path of destruction will end when we believe and follow God's way..... presented by Jesus.

"Indeed" is like putting the font in bold.

INDEED, the gift of Jesus is for healing, deliverance and Not to be used for condemnation or any other sort of abuse.

Consider Jesus, the invitation from God, to be a "reset"/reboot.

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Continuing with the text:

The human judgment is self inflicted, according to verse 18.

We are the judges. This is noteworthy.

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When reading the next three verses, we must remember that light and dark are metaphors

The part about people loving the darkness is not about an unlit, city alleys or basement hideouts.

Light is illumination--full exposure, disclosure.... truth, as best we understand truth. This is what Jesus presents to us.

Darkness is deception, denial and ignorance. [repeat]

Keep in mind, ignore forms ignorance.

Ignorance is not about education. It is about blocking / ignoring facts, information..... truth.

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So, we think we get it.

Those who love darkness are in deep trouble because they do bad things in that state of deception and ignorance.

And, according to verse 21:

"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."

[repeat]

We affirm this stuff. It forms the columns and buttresses of our religion.

Pretty straight forward,.....but there is a huge problem.

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My word study confirmed The word "love" in "God so loved the world" is agape love.

Ancient Greek had 6 words for love.

Agape love is selfless love. The love one has for one's child.

We often call it divine love.

So, I was curious to see what word for love was used in verse 19, the "love for darkness."

Would it be "Philautia" the self love, narcissistic love?

Or maybe even Eros the passionate, sensual love?????

I was sure the "darkness" was all about greed and lust.

Shockingly, the love for darkness was "agape" love.

How can this be???

Agape was reserved for all things good, so I thought.

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Then it hit me, we can be so deluded that we serve and give of ourselves / our agape love to.....what is wrong / what is destructive.

We are able to deceive ourselves to think our values and beliefs are noble,.....yet they may not be.

We can have ignorant righteousness.....that is actually destructive and counter to God's way.

We can be devoted to what is in reality judgmental and hurtful.

~~~~~[ ]

Visions of storming the U.S. Capital came to mind.

When considering this possibility, confidence in the authority of Christian doctrine and tradition can crumble.

The pillars, columns and buttress can collapse.

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There was a time when Christians proudly, confidently flaunted their lists of rules,.... mostly what Not to do and things to avoid.

We picked a verse here and there to bolster our values, and we loved it. We really loved it.

Our constructed belief system worked for us and affirmed us.

We loved it. And, we may still love it.

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The exposure of the light can send us into a Deep Wilderness of the Soul.
This is much like being bitten by poisonous snakes.

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*Years ago, a close friend of mine went straight to seminary after university. He carried with him a strong confidence in his Sunday School Christianity. He expected to build on that religion /those doctrines.*

*The brilliant light of sound Biblical examination blew him out of the water. He did not last even one year. His illusions were popped. Moreover, his relationship with God was not strong enough to pull him out of the Deep Wilderness.*

*He never did recover. And, he chose a different career.*

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Poisonous snakes can be lethal.

The darkness/the ignorance includes the obvious, such as melding Christian words to racism, white supremacy and capitalism. *Oh, people love the theology of prosperity.*

To be sure, the deceptions in the darkness usually scream when illuminated. We humans love our prejudices. We don't want to give them up.

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I do not think those examples reflect our misplaced "love".  
They are not our darkness. I hope not.

Some other examples are claiming there are good people and bad people. That is ignorance.

Another is asserting the nationalistic mantra that our freedom is because our good people killed and died for us.  
That myth is dangerous and destructive.

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The church has a long history of loving the darkness.
And, that devotion tends to be passionate and zealous.

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*When I was in my mid twenties, I resumed attending church. I joined a familiar church from my past, unaware of its turn to fundamentalism. In essence, I went along with the doctrines they loved, but I was only half into it. Yet, I even became a deacon in the church.*

*During my time there I developed a close friendship with one of the members, Jim Townsend. He was a wonderful and gracious person.*

*We met once a week to pray together.*

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He was nominated to be a deacon. Behind closed doors, which are good places for darkness,... in camera, the other deacons affirmed his virtues. Yet, declared that he was unfit to be a deacon because he was married to a divorced woman.

*They decided on a "man", of course **a man**, who all agreed was of questionable character. Jim was deeply hurt.*

They loved their rules that they believed were holy and right.

I was fortunate to only be half in. My protest to them was an attempt to shed some light, but they chose the shadows.

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*Not long after that, the pastor refused to officiate the marriage of a couple in the church. I asked him why. He asserted, abusing a passage from Paul, "They would be unequally yoked."*

*She was a Black woman and he was white.*

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I left the church.

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Thankfully, most churches have or are moving out of **that** terrible darkness.

Even so, many churches have a pitiful history of treating LGBTQplus people. WE,.... WE tend to have a qualified love for them.... which puts us in the shadow, and it is hurtful. More light is needed.

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From the darkness comes pain, anguish and destruction. Yet, people love the darkness,.... and it is a misplaced love.

The darkness is ignorance, deception and corrupt beliefs.

Moreover, people fight and defend their darkness because light stings as it exposes. The defence usually plays out as judgment / condemnation on others. Any sort of judgment includes self judgment. As verse 18 noted, our judgment is self inflicted.

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The Hebrews thought they were better off back in Egypt. The poisonous snakes woke them up and the bronze snake / God's intercession illuminated them and God healed them.

God's gift of Jesus brings light. It is a reset to draw us out of the darkness and destruction. God's love and grace brings healing. Love with Grace is true.

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I wonder what love we may have for a darkness??
What, Who and when do we judge? That is a clue.
Discovering our darkness moves us to the light where we will find healing / salvation.

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Verse 21 prompts us to go to the light / **to be exposed** and to see. Doing so can be a  
frightful experience.

Yet, the light--**God's way** reveals that our only hope is grace--accepting and doing grace.  
Our own construction / our answers are likely flawed.

Loving God and striving to live as Christ is moving to the light.