

John 3:16

Part 1

God Loved the World

2.01.2005

Yesterday our calendars told us that we have a new beginning. Yet as we look at the world, we know that one day follows the next, and the new beginning yesterday does not help with the enormous heartache of Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and India.

And as we move our focus from the northern tip of the Indian Ocean, across to Iraq, we know that the calendar cannot fool us into thinking that there has been much of a change in the killings that keep occurring in the lead up to Iraq's elections.

This terror, from natural causes and from people, is not just something to have cursed modern life. The world's history, etched into some of the most beautiful landscapes, has been of terror, hostility, envy and disputes. Life can be very harsh and painful, not just because of our environment, but also because of the way people treat each other.

It should be different in church, but in each generation there have been on going disputes. Even though God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, and his love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given to us, Christians can find it hard to get on with each other.

& it is not just Christians who find it hard. Everyone finds it hard to get on with at least one person.

It may be the person they are married to, or related to, or work with, or try to avoid down the road.

& that bitterness, harshness and warring is also there between people and God. It is not uncommon for uncertainty to be the major belief about God these days.

It is seen in-jokes about God's gender, skin colour, and preferences, let alone in the confusing and competing claims of religious people.

Bette Middler sang a song a few years ago which gave one expression of God's supposed view.

She sang that God is watching us, from a

distance. But as the song progresses, it is clear that from a distance everything looks rosy, whereas up close there is war. From a distance the world is lovely, but up close it's awful. From a distance people seem to be getting on, but up close we are killing each other.

From a distance, we are insignificant and we have not blown up the place. But is God just at a distance?

Today, I want us to begin a series on one of the best known verses in the Bible, John 3:16. I want to concentrate on the first bit today, and over the next few weeks, you are more than welcome to come back and bring your friends, to hear more.

But that well known verse starts with a surprise. *'For God so loved the world'*

We know it so well, the surprise does not shock us. But when we think what our world is really like, maybe it should.

John 3:16 says that God loves this world! Our world! Not just the breathtaking scenery of the Jamieson Valley, nor the incredible architecture around Sydney Cove.

God loves the good and the bad bits. He loves those who love Him, and those who could not care less. He loves those who praise him, and those who would rather destroy him or have nothing to do with him.

He loves the good, the bad, and the ugly.

So what do we conclude?

Do we assume that since he loves the world, that either he is totally stupid, or sadistic, or crazy?

Or, do we realise that His love does not rest on how we respond back? He will continue to love us in spite of what we do or think. As a devoted Father, His love remains constant through the traumas of His children's rebellion.

But does this love mean that He sits up there and does nothing? Does He simply accept anyone and everything, because He loves us? Is there no discernment in His love?

There is action and discernment, but whatever that action and discernment is, it is first and foremost couched in, showered in and overflowing with love.

And for that, if nothing else, we should be giving such great thanks and praise to God. For, no matter how you think this world is going and what 2005 may hold in store for us, God's love has been and will be consistent.

Over the coming weeks, the sermons will look at what His love has prompted God to do about this world he loves.

But today, pause to give thanks to Him for all that His love has brought.

For each person is important and is loved by God. And we want to thank God for all the ways that He has blessed us through time.