

Lent 4, 2009  
Good Hope Lutheran Church  
John 3: 19

In the Gospel of John, chapter 3, we find what certainly may be the most famous verse in the whole entire Bible—there was a time you couldn't watch a pro athlete kick either an extra point or maybe shoot a free throw without seeing "John 3: 16" up in the stands somewhere. Plenty of basketball on TV this week, so you're probably getting enough of John 3: 16 posters, I'd like to look instead at John 3: 19. John 3: 19, which says this. "This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light."

The Word of God.

Grace mercy and truth be multiplied among you in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Imagine your family, sitting down to dinner after another brutally long day. Everybody's hungry. Everybody's hungry, and the food is there ready and waiting; but as it's being served Junior decides, that he doesn't like what you're having. "I don't like this stuff!" he says. "It's gross, I want something different." Now some parents I suppose—soft hearted and, frankly, maybe soft headed too—some parents will rush off to the kitchen to make something else, something that Junior wants and will actually eat. Umm, in my house? That would get real old, real fast, so parents I think you know what you need to tell Junior instead. You need to say "I'm sorry Junior. This is what's for dinner tonight, and there's nothing else. You can choose to eat it, or you can choose to be hungry, it's up to you." Big meanie! Big meanie, well no, you're not. You're not condemning your child to be hungry, you're not forcing this 'precious little angel' to go without food and nearly starve. You're simply giving them a choice, that's all, and you're letting them live with the consequences. There's food here, there is, and it's good and it's for you, take it, you're welcome, but if you don't want to take it. If you don't want to take it then I guess you'd rather be hungry, simple as that.

Now if this homely little example makes the least bit of sense to you, then I think you'll understand the way Jesus has of explaining "The Last Judgment," as hinted at here in John ch. 3. There are of course other Scriptures which speak to the subject of The Last Judgment, other

images perhaps, but this is Jesus in John 3, Jesus says “Here’s the light. Here’s the light! Take it, receive it, it’s for you and you’re welcome to it! Here’s the light!—but if you want to choose darkness instead, I guess you can. Here is life and salvation!” Jesus says. “But if death sounds more fun, or if you’d rather have something other than salvation then go ahead. Knock yourself out.” The image we get here of Judge Jesus so to speak. The mental picture I have of Judge Jesus based on John 3 is not angry or vindictive with eyes flashing fury. This is the Savior we’re talking about, since when do His eyes ever flash fury? No, the mental picture I have of Jesus the judge is a very sad and mournful Lord, who can finally only say to someone “Ok. Ok, if that’s what you want, take it and go.” Is there any judgment from God that could be harder on us, than simply letting us have what we think we want? Could God do anything worse to us, than what we choose to do to ourselves? “This is the judgment. The light has come. And people love darkness more than light.” And sadly, so do we. And we live with the consequences.

Now it seems to me, from this point on the sermon could go in a variety of directions. Let me dare to be boring here, and simply list for you a few key points.

#1. If any of what I’ve said thus far is at all interesting to you, the book to read for further information is called The Great Divorce, by C. S. Lewis. C. S. Lewis, Chronicles of Narnia, that guy? The Great Divorce has nothing to do with the institution of marriage, by the way, but speaks instead to this theme of judgment not as God’s angry condemnation, but God at last sadly letting us have what we think we want. The title is in the bulletin, read it if you care to, that’s #1.

#2. It is always tempting for a Christian to look at the world out there and say, “Tsk tsk. Tsk tsk, no wonder there’s so much sadness and suffering, no wonder there’s such turmoil, look at all those people who have chosen darkness rather than light!” Tempting, maybe, but pointless. God will deal with the world, we don’t need to worry about that. God will deal with the world, what you need to deal with is the sin in your own life. Where in your life do you choose to go your own way? When and how do you willfully, stubbornly turn your back on God—when and how, and why? What hell have you created for yourself and your family, by not letting God in? If

there's something on your heart this day, you know what it is, and so does God. No need to shake your head sadly at the world out there, at least not until God has dealt with what's in your own heart, and in your family, and He has turned you to His Light at last. May this be the day.

3. Speaking of the world, as I just did in passing. Speaking of the world, John chapter 3 tells us plainly how God intends to deal with it. Ready for this? God intends to save it. God wants to save this world, and everyone in it, God loves the world! Always has, always will. For God so loved *the world*, it says. So all those people all those situations out there we're tempted to tsk tsk at? God means to save them too. God sent Jesus for every last one of them, and wants them in heaven, every bit as much as He wants you.

In sum. God doesn't really need your help judging the world. He does earnestly request your active assistance, in loving the world? Today's a good day to start.

And finally, 4. About "the Last Judgment." The last Choice, the dreadful last Decision made by God about your everlasting fate? You realize, in a very real sense, He's already made it? The last choice, the final decision made by God about you—it's already done, it's over, it's Jesus Christ, who died and rose again! Read the text, note words like already—God's decision is made. It's Jesus, it's the cross—that's His last word on the subject.

God could have dealt with the world in anger. God could have dealt with us in anger. God chose to deal with us and the world, in Christ Jesus, who died and rose again. Believe in Him and you are saved. Trust in Him, and you can live the life of the Kingdom, starting now, lasting forever. God's final word to you has already been spoken—not an angry condemnation, not an angry condemnation. But a merciful call, a gentle welcome home—may you hear that word, and know that welcome, unto life everlasting. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.