

Lent 4
March 14, 2021
John 3:14-21

"Am I good enough?" Ever been plagued with that question? In many ways, it is a terrifying question. Think of the pressure that a student may feel when he or she knows that they need to do well on the next test, of they will flunk the course for the semester. *What if they are not good enough?* A sixteen year walks into the DMV ready to take their road test to get their license. It's exciting, and it's terrifying. What happens if they don't pass? Not only will his or her family know, but all their friends will know. *What if they are not good enough?* A high school student has worked hard to get ready for the tryouts for the football team. They have been working out the whole summer. They want to play. They want to be on the team with all their heart. *But what happens if they are not good enough?* A high school student has worked hard all year. It's time to take the ACT. They know that they need a good score to be able to get into the college that they want to attend. *What if they are not good enough?* Parents, remember when you held your child in your arms the first time. You were so thrilled and excited to have this new gift in your life. Then comes the terrifying thought: *What if I'm not good enough to be a good parent?* You walk into the room for the job interview. It's the moment that you have been working for. It's your dream job, and you want to work there so much. *But what if you are not good enough?* You've worked hard for 40 years. It's getting to that moment that you have been dreaming about; the moment that you will retire. *What happens if you don't have enough money to retire on?*

Am I good enough? How does a person feel when they ask the same question about where they will spend eternity? It's terrifying, isn't it? I think that there is this little nagging voice that is inside of us that asks: *Am I good enough?* It can even be more terrifying to answer that question with a "No." You see that "no" answer is the correct answer. No one in this world is good enough to get into heaven by their own efforts. So, how do we answer that plaguing question: *"Am I good enough?"* It is a question that Jesus answers for us today in our text.

If you look at your life and what is going on around you, what do you see? I have no doubt that each of us can look at our lives and see that they are filled with all kinds of blessings. We have wonderful families. We have some awesome experiences in our lives. We know very loving people. But we also see the struggles that we may go through. It's hard to believe that it has already been a year since the COVID pandemic shut down the world as we knew it. Maybe we have felt so alone when you haven't been able to see family members or able to be with our friends. Maybe this past year brought health issues into your life that you would never have guessed that they were coming. Maybe you lost your job or had your hours cut, and you have been seriously thinking if you will make it or not. You really don't love the things that have been happening to your life. Maybe, you just simply don't understand why God is letting what is happening to you happen. We are tempted to ask that question, *"Am I good enough?"* because God doesn't seem to love me right now.

The words of Jesus in our text for today are directed at a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was not sure what to believe about Jesus. He was a member of the Jewish ruling council and a Pharisee, so he was very familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. He knew the prophecies found in the pages of the Old Testament. He knew the passages that pointed to the coming Messiah. He knew that Jesus was a powerful teaching who had performed miracles. But Jesus was also a mystery to him. He was a religious leader who felt trapped in a helpless and hurt-filled life. He didn't know a way out. His friends weren't helping. So one night he snuck away to meet Jesus. That night, Jesus was ready to answer Nicodemus' questions.

But Jesus did something more than just answer Nicodemus' questions. He put something new into Nicodemus' life. He gave him something that would answer the question: *Am I good enough?* He wanted him to know that, even though he lived in a world that was filled with brokenness, God still loved him. He wanted him to know, and us to know, that **"God so loved the world."** Jesus also tells you that even though you may not always love your world, God loves your world and he loves you. With that love comes the strength, the hope, the encouragement, and is exactly what you need. It changes how you look at the world around you.

Some years ago, a consultant was hired by a supermarket chain to lead a customer service program to build customer loyalty back to that chain shared a true story. She challenged everyone at the event that she was presenting to make a difference and create memories for their customers to bring them back. Johnny, a nineteen year-old bagger with downs syndrome liked what she said but wondered what he could do. After all, he was just a bagger. Yet, the words of that consultant stuck in his head: *"Your words and actions matter, so go make a difference."*

Johnny was inspired by those words. His life mattered. He could make a difference. So as Johnny made his way home, he started to think about how he could make his encounters with customers more meaningful, how he could give them something that would make a difference in their lives. That's when he had an idea. When he got home, he wrote down a "thought for the day." It was a kind and helpful statement that he thought would bring some cheer to the people in the grocery store line. His dad helped him type the *"thought for the day"* into the computer. Every day as he went to work, he would take along his *"thoughts for the day."* Every time that he bagged someone's groceries, he put his *thought* into their bag. He would smile and say: *"I put something extra in the bag for you. I hope it helps you have a nice day."*

Johnny's line began to grow each day. When the managers tried to usher people into shorter lines, they refused to go because they wanted Johnny's *"thought for the day."* Soon the culture of the store began to change. When the floral department had a broken flower or unused corsage the workers would usually throw the flowers away. But now they searched the store for an older woman or little girl and, with a smile and greeting, presented the flower to her. The meat manager went and bought smiley stickers to put on the packages of meat. What started from one person, spread to all in the store. What started from one act of love from Jesus spreads to all he loves.

Jesus came to tell you that you aren't good enough to earn your way into heaven. He came to do it for you. **"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned."** It was God who chose to send his Son into the world to love the world. He loves each of you here today. Why would he do this? **"Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."** May God use each of us to bring his love into a world who so desperately needs it. God grant it. Amen.