

*So Loved*  
*The Reverend Robert M. Zanicky*

February 10, 2008

First Presbyterian Church  
Wilkes-Barre, PA  
John 3:1-16

Happy Valentine's Day!!!!

Fellows, it's just days away! Here's a friendly reminder; reservations book quickly. Normally the 14<sup>th</sup> is too late! Just trying to help to keep the day filled with Love!

That reminds me. A young woman was taking an afternoon nap. After she woke up, she told her husband, "I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for Valentine's Day. What do you think it means?" You'll know tonight," he replied. That evening, the man came home with a small package, and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it only to find a book, titled: The Meaning of Dreams.

I hope you all fare better than this poor slob.

But how about "Love?"

A simple/complex word. (Google "Love" - .14 sec. – 23,700,000 hits. There's something about Love.) Filled with intensity, desire, hope, vision, comfort and security. No human being will find his/her purpose, meaning without venturing into the realm of love, with all of its manifestations – familial, romantic, friendship and spiritual!

This morning I want you to focus on your spiritual self and your relation to divine love, God's love. Friends, to truly believe in a God of love, to truly take that proposition into your worldview, into your interpretation of your life and the life of our (your) world, will change your life!! Perhaps you just need a little reminder this morning. God loves you! Believe this and you can't help but see your world differently.

Not an absent God.

Not a deistic divinity.

But a personal God – who loves you! You! You! You! All of the yous on earth!

Love, meaning and purpose are intimately linked within each one of our hearts!

"Cleopatra's Needle stands out like the foreigner she is in London. Her engravings speak of a different era and employ an ancient language. Workers constructed the obelisk 3,500 years ago as a gift for an Egyptian pharaoh. But on September 12, 1878, the British government planted it in English soil and assigned it vigil over the Thames River.

F.W. Boreham was there. He was seven years old the day his father and mother took him on the train to London to witness the moment. He described the "great granite column, smothered with its maze of hieroglyphics." He watched the relic ascend "from the horizontal to the perpendicular, like a giant waking and standing erect after his long, long sleep."

His father explained the significance of the structure: how it once guarded the great temple at Heliopolis. Pharaohs passed it in their chariots. Moses likely studied on its steps. And now, book-ended by stone sphinxes, Cleopatra's Needle stood on a British waterway with a time capsule interred in her base. Someday, city officials reasoned, when Britain goes the way of ancient Egypt, excavators will open the box to find a slice of Victorian England. They'll discover a set of coins, children's toys, a city directory, photographs of the twelve most beautiful women of the day, a razor, and, in 215 languages, a verse from

the Bible; “For God so loved the world that he gave this one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (3:16 The Numbers, Lucado, 2007.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century this belief of a God of Love was believed to be of such importance that they wanted those of us in the future to know that they believed “God so love the world...” In fact they wanted to be sure this was understood and shared. Imagine, one verse (the “sunum bonum” of the Christian Faith), in 215 different languages! Have they made their point?! The 215 verses remain entombed, but not really!

If you haven’t committed this one verse to memory, do so – for your spiritual health, and for others.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” This rings out in all languages!

God so loved!! The same in any tongue!!

God loves you! Believe this and you can go through any hardship, traverse any barrier, overcome any obstacle!!

When life is throwing all it can against you, recite – envision – god so loved! God loves me!

My friends, this is a way of life, I’m talking about. This is a way of living, defining your existence! From waking to sleeping, “God so loved!”

The Bible is filled with this way of life, in both Testaments. For those who think of the Old Testament as just about law and an aggressive God, think again! “Love” is mentioned over 500 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, over 360 times in the New Testament.

Deut... 7:7-8 shares about God’s love; “The Lord set his love upon you and chose you...the Lord loves you...”

Jer. 31:3 “I (the Lord) have loved you with an everlasting love.”

Malachi 1:2 “I have loved you,” says the Lord.

An ancient and contemporary mindset, God so loved! God loves you!

But, how could God love me? Jesus says – remember the Prodigal Son – he leaves his father, wastes his time, talents and wealth – comes to his senses and makes his way back home - his father has never, never stopped watching for the return of his wayward child. “But while he (the Prodigal) was yet at a distance, his father saw him...and ran and embraced and kissed him.”

God so loved!! This is the way to see and live your life!

Jesus’ good friend Lazareth dies. Sisters, Mary and Martha are broken hearted, grieving for the loss of their brother. Jesus arrives and goes to the grave, and we read, “Jesus weeps” for his friend. Those around him exclaim, “See how he loved him!”

God so loved!

“But, there is so much to keep me from this belief, this worldview!” Yes, the bottom line is your choice. It’s easier for some, harder for others.

I love what Paul believed and shared in Romans 8; “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation,

Or distress,

Or persecution,

Or famine,  
Or nakedness,  
Or peril,  
Or sword?...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What’s happening now? What will happen in your future will not change the faith/fact that God so loved – God loves you!

If you chose to awaken to each new day declaring, “God so loved” – your life will be different!

Amen.