



For God So Loved the World

John 3:16

TRINITY PULPIT

Simon Senek, the author of *Start With Why*, begins his book with the story of two brothers whom we know very well in North Carolina – the Wright Brothers. Wilbur and Orville were not the only ones seeking to create a flying machine. There was another man named Samuel Pierpont Langley. Langley—sound familiar? He had an advanced degree and was a senior officer at the Smithsonian. He had the backing of powerful men like Andrew Carnegie and Alexander Graham Bell. He put together a team of experts and scientists, and yet the first person to fly was not Langley but two brothers who ran a bicycle shop in Ohio. On the Wright team was not one person who had an advanced degree or a college education. They had no government grants. They had no funding for their venture. Yet, on December 17, 1903, their invention would change the world. It wasn't luck writes Senek. Langley had science and funding, but the Wright Brothers had something more. They had inspiration. They had the ability to inspire their team to greatness. Langley's enterprise was about something that would be a great investment, but the Wright Brothers began with Why. They wanted to fly. Senek reminds us we must start with Why.

Senek writes:

It is one of life's greatest joys to wake up in the morning... every morning, With a clear sense of why that day matters, why every day matters. This is what it means to find your WHY. This is the start of an inspiring journey... your inspiring journey.

In his book, he suggests that in business people do not buy your what as much as they buy your why. He goes on to suggest that we cannot speak of what we do or what we produce until we know why we do it. There is always a risk of trying to apply

business books and theory to faith, and in no way does Senek suggest that his business and leadership insight is faith-based. Although, I find much of what he suggests the very things that Jesus taught. Jesus taught that people were more important than anything else and that true leadership is servant hood. These are all themes you find in Senek's writing. So, although it is not always transferable, I found Senek's book thought provoking. When I read this book several years ago, I began to ponder, "How would we as a church describe our why?" We know a lot about what we do and when we do it. We have a 10-page newsletter every week and a bulletin every week, and a Facebook page, and an instagram page, and an email blast to let you know what we do and when we do it.

We know we offer worship, Bible study, mission opportunities, fellowship, and support of each other. We know the when and even some of the how of what we do. The question though, at the foundation, is why we do it. Are we merely another advocacy group? Are we just another non-profit to do good in our culture? Are we simply another way that a person finds some "good people" to hang out with so as to influence their own actions? Are we just another part of a parent's attempt to raise smart, wise, good, and successful children?

Why do we gather? Why do we tithe and give? Why do we study so we can teach one another? Why? Why? Why? We have to go deeper than just what we do, how we do it, and when we do it. We have to rediscover why.

The why of our existence as the church is Jesus. Jesus must be the center of why we exist and what we are called then to do. I have been saying for some time we must get Jesus back in our vocabulary and discussions, for at the center of God's heart is the

mission of Jesus.

This is the way the Bible puts it: For God so loved the world that God sent his one and only Son that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life. My friends, the good news is not that Trinity Baptist Church showed up. The good news, the only news that really matters, is that Jesus showed up.

We have to go deeper than just what we do, how we do it, and when we do it. We have to rediscover why.

When I thought about the why for us followers of Jesus and for us a church, I kept coming back to this very familiar verse. John 3:16 is one of the most quoted verses of the Bible. It is essentially the gospel in one verse. Now, there are other verses that we might have chosen. We might have chosen the new commandment that Jesus gave us to love one another as self. We might have chosen the greatest commandment of loving the Lord God with all of self. We might have chosen the great commandment to go and make disciples of all nations. All of these would be fitting for our why. However, I just kept coming back to this simple verse.

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The verse is not uttered in a vacuum. It is stated to one of the great leaders and teachers of Jerusalem. John describes this encounter with Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Ruling Council. He was a part of the Sanhedrin. Being in Jerusalem and being a part of this ruling council made him a very powerful man and a very respected man. We are told that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. This is not surprising. Jesus was not a part of the ruling class. Jesus was teaching things that were not accepted as normal. In addition, John places this conversation following Jesus' clearing the Temple. Other gospel writers place Jesus' clearing of the Temple area in the final week of Jesus' life, but John places this story at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

So why would this act prompt a conversation with Nicodemus? Nicodemus was probably a very righteous man. He was a man who was zealous for God. Maybe he too found the acts in the Temple to be detestable and thought worship needed to be purified. He definitely is open to this message of Jesus. It is important for us to remember that in this conversation we have a Pharisee and a Rabbi or teacher.

Both are Jewish, both are leaders, and both want to be pleasing to God. So, Nicodemus comes to Jesus and says Rabbi, we know you are from God. Your miracles show us that you are from God. Then Jesus replies, I tell you the truth no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. Nicodemus questions Jesus how can this be? Then I think in jest Nicodemus says how can someone reenter the womb and be born a second time. Nicodemus knows Jesus does not mean physically born again. Nicodemus knows that Jesus is speaking in Spiritual terms but does not understand what Jesus is saying. Jesus says one must be born of the Spirit. There must be a change of heart. There must be a change of life to enter the Kingdom of God. How does this occur?

Jesus gets to the crux of the teaching when he states: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* (John 3:16-17)

This is the why of our lives as followers of Jesus and it is the why of the church. We are here because God loves us and sent Jesus to us and to the world that we might have life.

Let's look at this simple verse to remind us of our why. First, our why begins with God. It is not that we somehow reached up to God but that God initiated an action of love toward us. In fact, Jesus says no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man or Jesus. Jesus is saying that one does not have this born again spirit by ascending mystically into heaven. Being born again — having a spiritual new life — is the initiative of God and not us.

Our why begins not so much with who we are as much as it is who God is. Just for our beginning thinking today, Jesus says three important things about God's initiative. First, Jesus reminds us that God is love. What prompts God to act is God's love. For God so loved. Because God loves you and me and the whole world, God acts.

I am always reminded that the Bible describes God with emotional terms. God grieves. God is angered by actions of others. God relents, that is changes God's plan as the result of confession and prayer of God's own creation. However, the only

phrase that fully describes God in our understanding and terms is God is love. God gets angry and grieves, but God is love. In other words, we might say that God's why is love. God acts from love.

There are two verbs here. There is the term love and the term gave. Both indicate action. The love God has is not a fleeting feeling. It is not a simple emotion. It is a definite action as a result of character. So Jesus says God is love and acts out of love and that action is a provision. For God so loved he gave his one and only son that through him we might have eternal life.

God loves and acts out of love and that action is provision for us.

Our "why" begins with the character of God and God's action of provision for us.

Our why is found in the nature and character of God.

Our why is found in the person and mission of Jesus. Jesus says of himself, God gave his one and only son. It is an interesting phrase. The term is monogeneses. It is a compound word of only and genes. When used in the Bible one and only almost always describes a parent-child relationship. Luke uses it to describe the son of the widow that comes to Jesus. Hebrews uses it to describe Abraham and Isaac. John uses it five times, and every time John uses it, John refers to Jesus and God. That Jesus is God's one and only. The concept is that although God is the Father of all humanity, only Jesus holds the DNA of the Father. Jesus is one and only or begotten as it is sometimes translated, in that Jesus has the same essence, eternal life span, unending wisdom and tireless energy of God. Every quality we attribute to God we can attribute to Jesus.

Our why is initiated by God; and that act is that God gave us – shared with us – Jesus. Thus, if God gave Jesus, then this is what we have to offer as well. The sharing of Jesus with others, the telling of others about Jesus, the introduction of Jesus to others, is our why.

Jesus had a mission. God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son for a purpose. That purpose was salvation. Jesus tells us the nature of his mission. It was not to condemn the world but to

save it through him.

Jesus has come on a mission. Our why is the mission of Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that the very mission of Jesus was our mission. I want you to listen to what he says:

¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our why is to reconcile others to God through Christ. What is our great purpose? Our purpose is to share the mission of Jesus so that God might make his appeal of love through us.

John 3:16 is our why. We are here because of God's love and we are here to share God's love. We are here because in Christ there is life. Jesus makes a promise. Jesus says that God so loved the world that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life. That term everlasting is an important word. When we think of everlasting life we think of life without end. We think of life beyond this mortal life. This is true. The promise of God is life beyond the length of this life. However this word means so

much more.

The word in the Greek is the word for a different kind of life. If we want to know what the New Testament means by "life," we need to look at the word as it appears in the original Greek language.

Our why begins not so much with who we are as much as it is who God is.

each is used:

1. *Bios*, in Luke 8:14: "...anxieties and riches and pleasures of this life." This Greek word refers to the life of the physical body and is where we get the word biology.

2. *Psuche*, in Matt. 16:25: "For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it." The Greek word here refers to the psychological life of the human soul, that is, the mind, emotion, and will. It is where we get the word psychology.

3. *Zoe*, in John 1:4: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Here the Greek word refers to the uncreated, eternal life of God, the divine life uniquely possessed by God. It is the word Jesus uses when he says I have come to give you life and life abundantly.

It is all about *Zoe*. It is all about the life that God gives to us. So, here is the question for us. Do we really believe that in Jesus it is the best life?

There is a story about a man who was working in a field. He did not own this field but in the midst of his work he unearthed a great treasure. He knew he had to have it. So he went back to his own small house and land and he sold it. He sold his furniture. He sold all that he had and he went and begged the owner of the field to sell him the field. The owner could not turn down the man's offer. The man bought the field and found his treasure. He knew it was worth everything he owned.

Maybe you recognize that story. It is a story that Jesus told about the Kingdom of God. It was Jesus' way of saying that once you find the Kingdom of God, there is nothing that will satisfy you.

We are here because we actually believe that knowing God through Jesus is worth everything. We believe that life is not real life without Jesus. Only Jesus gives *ZOE* — Eternal and Abundant life. My friends, when we believe that God gives us real life, then nothing else will do and we must believe that this is for everyone.

*It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. (C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*)*

Jesus said what does it gain a person to have the whole world but lose his or her soul in the process. If the life that Jesus offers is real life, then we really have a why for living.

What is your why? To be sure, we have many whys. Our why when it comes to our family might be one thing. Our why when it comes to that which causes us to do a good job might be another. But as followers of Jesus we have a why. Our why is found in this simple verse. Our why originates with God. It is the message of the mission of Jesus. It is the belief that God in Jesus can truly give us life.

1. Do you know this life?
2. As a follower of Jesus have you forgotten the great calling you have in Christ?
3. As a church have we forgotten our why? ▲

