

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 John 3:16(NIV)

If there is only one verse almost everyone has seen it is this one. Whether you've heard it, or saw signs for it at sporting events it seems to be ever present in our culture. The gospel from the second Sunday in Lent, contains this verse.

The problem is that we have been exposed to it so many times, the meaning can get lost.

Luther called this verse the "gospel in miniature". That is, this verse tells us exactly what Jesus' ministry was about. Jesus is here so that we can be in relationship with God always.

You see the history of God's people in the Old Testament is littered with the failure of a people to be relationship to God by keeping God's law. There had to be an answer for as the above verse tells us that "God so loved the world" Jeremiah the prophet hints as to what it will look like when he said:

³³ *"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD.*

*"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.*

*I will be their God,
and they will be my people.*

³⁴ *No longer will they teach their neighbor,
or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.*

*"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more." Jeremiah 31: 33-34*

You see from a very practical and honest human stand point , we cannot maintain a relationship with God based on our own efforts. The people of the Old Testament were a specific people God chose, but as human beings they are no different than any of us. We may have our focused intention on being a "good person," or longing for something more in our lives. In this day and age I think it has a lot with our society's desire to be "spiritual".

Yet in the final analysis, if it is something that we do, we can wind up letting ourselves down. Sometimes it is because our efforts to be "good" hit the inevitable wall when we've done something bad. Sometimes it is because our own efforts to be "spiritual" come to a screeching halt when our work schedule gets turned up side down, and time to pursue "spirituality" is a luxury. Sometimes it can happen when we've turned to someone for guidance or inspiration, and they have in some fashion "let us down".

So what do we do? The answer is "do" nothing. The verse tells us that "*whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*" When we trust in Jesus Christ, crucified, dead and risen for us, we have our relationship with the eternal God to eternity.

The next time you read that verse substitute "*the world*" with your name, then do same in substituting the word "*whoever*" with your name. That is God's desire for an unbreakable relationship with you with simple but profound act of faith on your part.

In fact you be unaware that such a relationship is there, given in our baptism, and renewed each time we receive Holy Communion.

BUT maybe you need to acknowledge it in prayer to God too. Tell God you know you can't do it on your own, then put your faith in Jesus Christ who gives you "life without ending". You will be glad you did.