

THE WORD FOR TODAY

**JOHN 3, 16-21: “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”**

If you learn by heart only one verse from the Bible, then the opening verse of this passage is a good one. It sums up God’s sacrificial love for all of us, giving us the hope which lights up our lives today.

John wrote his Gospel when he was an old man. He had pondered who Jesus was and wrote a book which was more reflection than narrative. He wanted his readers to understand Jesus as the Son of God, bringing light and life to the world and showing us God’s love and saving grace in his life and death and rising again.

He wanted us to know that for our part we only have to believe, to trust in the God who loves us so much—that’s all we have to do, although we will find that it changes us! Please read on—it’s such an important passage for our life’s journey.



Follow the words of this short Bible passage on seven panels around the church. The first is just round the corner on the north wall of this little building and the others are on the east wall of the church (right as you look from here) for panels 2 and 3, on the back door (4), and on the west wall (5, 6 and 7). The translation of the Bible used is the New International Version, and you can look it up on the internet under Bible Gateway.

“God so loved the world”

1



God doesn't just love the “nice” bits— the beautiful countryside, the good people, the cuddly animals—God loves every bit of the world he created.

Why is that really special for us? It tells us that whatever we may have done, whatever we are ashamed of, however undeserving we may be, God loves us.

What does it encourage us to do? To love God in return, yes, but also to love his world too, and to do our very best to look after it. Perhaps lockdown has helped us to appreciate just what a valuable and beautiful asset it is in our lives—let's not lose that!

***Lord, help me to appreciate your love for me.
Help me to love the rest of your world, people and planet,
with the same intensity.***

Now walk to the right of the church building to find panels 2 and 3.



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“ . . . that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

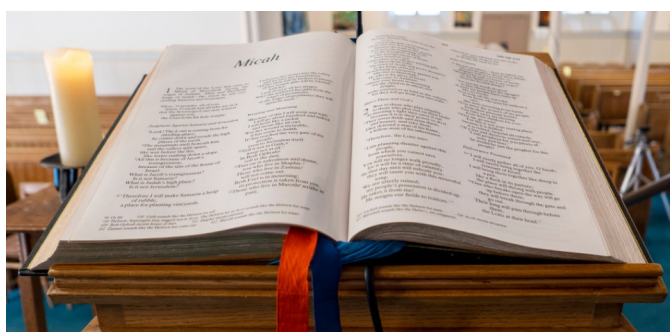
2



Two things stand out for me in these words:

- 1. God gave his one and only Son for us—can you imagine the depths of that love? He is willingly giving his very life so that we can live.**
- 2. We just have to believe—Jesus has done everything else; suffered the torture, made the sacrifice. What have we done to deserve this? How can my life change to be just a little more worthy of such love?**

***Lord, thank you for the hope these words give me.
Thank you for your sacrificial love.
Help me in response to change my life for the better.***



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

3

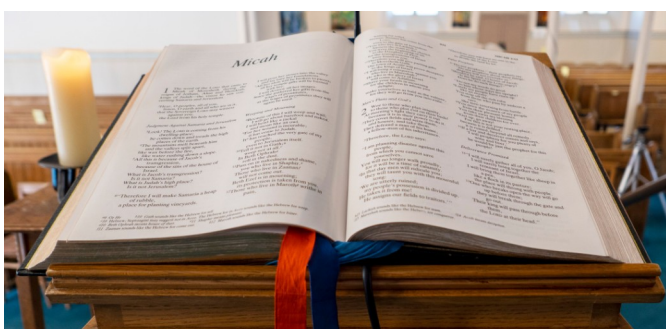


It was so deliberate, what God did—a deliberate saving act. No condemnation of all the bad things going on in the world, but just an intent to save that world and bring its people back to their God.

It makes you wonder how much better the world would be if we did a lot less of the condemning ourselves and a lot more of the saving.

***Lord, it's so easy to condemn others.
Teach me to leave the judging to you
and to try loving instead.***

Now walk along the back of the church—panel 4 is on the back door.



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“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

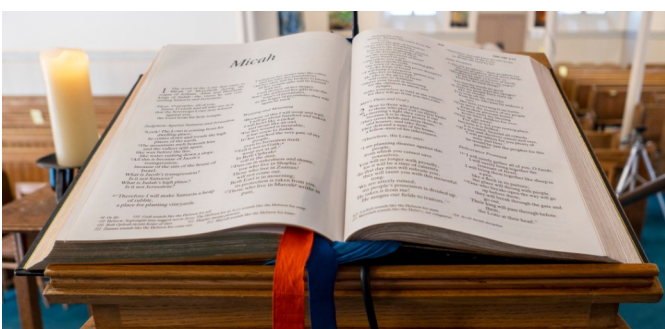
4

God is not condemning anybody; he wants to save them, but we condemn ourselves if we go our own way and don’t want to believe and trust in him. It seems such a simple request to believe in God, but we are such self-opinionated people that we think we can manage without him. It does take courage to relinquish all that self-centredness and surrender your life to God but look how much courage it took for Jesus to surrender his life on the cross. He knew that there was life ahead for him, and that’s what we can look forward to as well—a life worth living here and now and a life into the future with our loving Father in Heaven.



***Lord, save me from condemning myself.
Help me to surrender my love of self to you
and find the life you offer.***

Now walk further and turn left to find panels 5, 6 and 7



THE WORD FOR TODAY

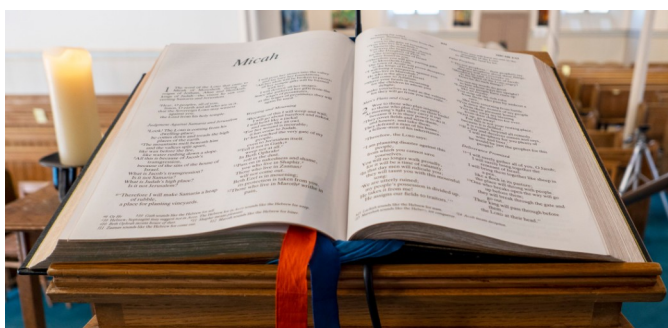
**“This is the verdict:
Light has come into the world, but
men loved darkness instead of light
because their deeds were evil.”**

5



Just as we can trust that the sun will rise every morning (even if there are often clouds to hide it!) so we can trust in the presence of Jesus, the Light of the World. When he walked this earth, many didn't want to know. Now his Spirit is with us every day of our lives and we have a choice to make—to welcome or to reject. It's down to us.

*Lord, we find it easier to trust the sunrise
than to commit to trusting you.
Help us to get to know you better and so find the peace we yearn for.*



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

6

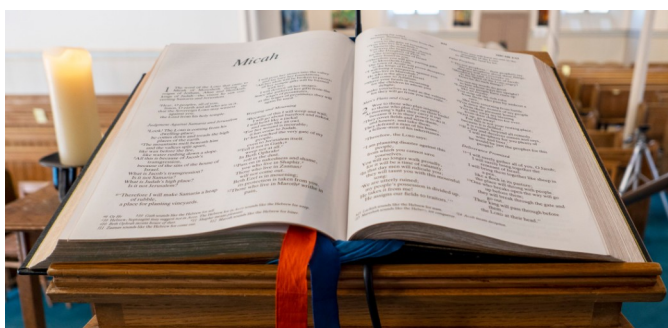
Where does domestic abuse take place? Behind closed doors. Where do stalkers lurk? In the shadows. Where does most drug dealing go on? Where it's not obvious except to those involved. I remember Richard Ingrams, then Editor of Private Eye, which published lots of scandal about people in the public eye, being asked how he would like people digging for dirt in his life. He said he wouldn't mind at all, but it wouldn't be at all productive for them. In other words, he had nothing to hide.

If we have something to hide perhaps it's time to confess it to God and have it forgiven and erased from our lives. We will find that out in the light we have no wish to return to the shadows and that then affects our behaviour—it's called “repenting”, or turning our lives around.



***Lord, forgive me for the things I'm ashamed of
and release me into the light of your love.
Help me to live in a better way, loving you and my neighbour.***

Panel no. 7 is on the church wall behind the cairn on the right



THE WORD FOR TODAY

“But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”



Alright, you may not feel like jumping for joy, or it might be crazy at your age with ice underfoot! To me, however, this picture captures the idea that if God brings colour and meaning to our lives then we shouldn't be afraid to show it. Let's tell people if he makes a difference!

***Lord, your presence in my life is truly life-changing.
Give me the courage to speak to others
of the difference you make.***

If you find it difficult to believe in the God you've been reading about—or if you would just like to know more—there are plenty of opportunities in our church life. For further information please contact John Young, by telephone on 664 3067 or by email on JYoung@churchofscotland.org.uk.



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Photographic Credits

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Panel 1	NASA on Unsplash
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Panel 3	Tingey Injury Law Firm on Unsplash
Panel 4	Priscilla du Preez on Unsplash
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