

The Adopted Life

Second Sunday of Lent ~ 03.20.2011

The Father's Gift to the World

It may be the most famous passage in all of scripture: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life* (John 3:16).

Does this mean we save ourselves by our belief? In John 3:1-15 Jesus has just finished explaining to Nicodemus that entering the Kingdom is like being born and seeing the wind blow. We don't get ourselves born do we? Nor do we cause the wind to blow, we simply observe its effects. In the very next verse, John 3:17, the Gospel says that Jesus' mission is to save the world. His mission is not to create the *mere potential* for salvation, which the world then actualizes through its own belief, but to actually accomplish the world's salvation in his own person and work. John 3:16 is not a formula that tells us how to get right with God. It is a statement about how the Triune Life has been given to the cosmos (the world). The Triune Life is not something we earn by a contract in which we exchange our belief for participation in the Son's relationship with the Father. The Triune Life is given to us, freely and without any contractual obligation, through the Son—the Father's gift to the cosmos.

So what does our belief do? When we believe that the Son is the Father's gift to the world, and that through him the universe is saved and participating in the Triune Life, we are then able to stop experiencing the perishing death of doubt and fully experience eternal life. And what is eternal life? To know God and his Son (John 17:3). Eternal life is far more than just existence. It is the life of the Trinity. This life has been given to the whole universe through the Son, and all who believe this truth about reality will experience the fullness of all that the Triune Life really is.

~ Jonathan Stepp