

For God so loved...\*  
 Lent 2 Year A  
 John 3:16  
 March 5, 2023\*

*I propose to show-that God loves us as we are so that we may love ourselves, forgive ourselves, accept ourselves and have true compassion for each other so that those hearing this sermon will do so.*

May the God who Creates us....  
 Please be seated.  
 Good Morning!

For God so loved the world  
 that God gave his only begotten son,  
 that whoever believes in him  
 may not perish,  
 but have eternal life.

John 3:16.

In the evangelical tradition  
 this verse is seen by many  
 as the crux of Christianity:  
 that it is all about  
 an individual's choice  
 to believe a set of propositions  
 about Jesus  
 that earn that person  
 eternal salvation—  
 what is known by many  
 as being born again.  
 I see this passage quite differently.

John 3:16,  
 strangely famous  
 as an “end-zone” sign in football games,  
 is not about us –  
 at least not initially –  
 it's about God.  
 It's all about  
 God's love for humanity  
 being so deep and so wide,  
 that God would give  
 of God's very self  
 to save us,  
 to forgive us  
 and make us whole.

John 3:16 is about God:  
God's love and God's forgiveness.  
Love and forgiveness are intertwined.  
One cannot be without the other.  
Love without forgiveness  
is short-lived,  
and forgiveness without love  
is impossible  
and God in the person of Jesus  
embodies that love,  
showing us how it is done  
so that we might embody that love  
for one another.

More than 50 years ago,  
in Perth, Australia  
Kelly Connor was 17 years old.  
She'd had her driver's license  
for just 3 months.  
That morning her dad  
was supposed to drive her to work  
at the telephone exchange.  
Instead, he decided  
to take advantage of his daughter's  
newly found independence  
and he gave her the car keys and slept in late.

Remember those days  
when we'd just gotten our driver's license.  
I used to go to the store for cat litter,  
we didn't even have a cat—  
but our neighbors did.

There was Kelly  
driving to work early in the morning.  
As she came up a hill  
a taxi was pulled to one side  
at the top of the hill.  
Kelly was nervous and worried  
that the cab might suddenly pull out.  
So, in order to get past the taxi quickly,  
she kept her foot  
firmly on the accelerator  
and her eyes to the side  
as she moved past the cab.

When she crested the hill,  
she watched him through the rear view mirror  
making sure  
she knew where he was.  
Finally her eyes shifted  
back to the road ahead.

She says,

“When I looked forward  
I saw an elderly lady  
in a green suit directly in front of me  
who was two thirds of the way  
across the road on a pedestrian crossing.

I immediately hit the brakes,  
causing her to look up in terror,  
with absolutely no hope of success  
she tried to out run me.  
I remember slamming on the brakes,  
I remember the sensation the squealing tires made,  
but curiously I don’t recall the actual noise.

The noise of the impact is also lost to me.  
I only remember  
the intense silence that followed it.  
She was lying on her stomach,  
unmoving,  
not far from the front left tire.  
Surprisingly there was no blood,  
or at least none  
that I allowed myself to see.  
I was relieved  
that I didn’t have to look at her face  
or have her look at mine.  
In the silence which followed

I could almost have convinced myself

it hadn’t happened. But, shaking uncontrollably, I managed to get out of the car and drape a blanket over the woman. That’s as much as the efficient part of me could manage. Very quickly after that the police and ambulance arrived. I was informed later that morning that Margaret Healey had died in hospital.”

At the police station an officer gently guided Kelly to say she'd been driving at a legal 35mph rather than the 45mph she'd really been doing. It was the policeman's way of protecting her and it was the first time she experienced someone forgiving her.

But it took a long time to see it that way, for many years she said, she wished she'd been punished.

Two weeks later, Margaret Healy's brother showed up at her house, he wanted her to know that no one in his family blamed her and he was sure Margaret would feel the same way. As generous as it was Kelly could not let herself accept his forgiveness. She couldn't forgive herself.

Kelly was never tried for the woman's death, which compounded her feelings of intense guilt and shame. Her family very quickly fractured. Her mother decreed that they would never speak of it and her father, who felt guilty for not driving her to work that day left and for nearly twenty years Kelly, in fact, didn't speak of it.

At one point she was so convinced she didn't have the right to continue living, she tried to commit suicide.

Kelly avoided most relationships and although she ventured into marriage she soon left her husband, taking her 2-year-old daughter with her.

It was however, she says, the birth of her daughter Meegan which made her want to live again.

When Meegan was four, Kelly started on a journey towards self-forgiveness, she'd tried to imagine how her life would have been without the accident –and during the process she realized that she is who she is because of Margaret Healey.

But, even allowing herself to consider forgiving herself brought up the full force of guilt again.

How can you be grateful for your life when you've killed someone?

She writes, "Meegan knew nothing of the accident but at aged 14 I knew I had to tell her, otherwise this secret between us would corrupt our lives.

After I told her, her daughter Meegan said, in a very matter-of-fact way, "So this is why we live such a peculiar life. Ok do you think we could start dealing with this now?"

Kelly said, her acceptance led me to start dealing with my past.”

In 2001 Kelly was asked to write a book about her experience. Going public terrified her but she knew she had to do it to help others who were traumatized by the guilt of causing a death. The book entitled, *To Cause a Death: The Aftermath of an Accidental Killing* resonated and the letters started flooding in.

It was a long journey toward forgiveness for Kelly, a life’s journey. It was Kelly’s daughter’s ability to understand and to still love her that allowed Kelly finally to begin forgiving herself.

There is something amazingly profound about being loved as we are, in the messiness of who we are.

It is John 3:16 in action.

John 3:16 writ large:

to be loved for who we are, as we are.

To be loved, to be forgiven that allows us to love ourselves, to forgive ourselves for those things we’ve done.

And Like Kelly, so often it’s not major character flaws that need forgiving. It’s momentary lapses in judgement that can put in motion events with powerful consequences and repercussions, both great and small.

John 3:16 means that no matter what, no matter how much we screw up, our God will not shun us, or condemn us, or abandon us to the messiness of our lives.

God is right here; loving, forgiving leading us to wholeness. God’s gift to us. And it can be our gift to each other.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.