

John 3:16 For God so Loved the World

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Notes from his first Sermon at Dexter Ave

Lent 4 Year B

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May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

Good Morning!

In the Fall of 1954, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began his call as the Pastor of Dexter Ave. Baptist Church. His text for his opening sermon was John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that God gave God's only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

Stanford University's: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute has a raft of Dr. King's papers. Among this collection are the notes, but not the actual sermon that the 25-year-old, Dr. King preached that fall morning as he began his first pastorate in the deeply segregated city of Montgomery, Alabama.

In a world that is filled with fear, fear that is digging deep chasms separating people one from another in our country, I am struck by the lasting power of his notes for the words he offered that Sunday morning some 70 years ago.

In thinking about how he might describe the characteristics of God's love, the following words are the notes for basis of his sermon that fateful morning.

**Dr. Kings says,** *God's love is unceasing and eternal, Love is an essential part of God's nature. Notice [he says that] the text says "God is Love." This can never be said about man [humanity]. We can never say that man is love. We can only say that man [humanity] loves. Love is not an essential part of [strikeout illegible] man's nature. But God is love. God's love is not a single act, but is the abiding state of God's heart. God does not begin to love. God's love have [has] no beginning and will have no ending. God always has loved and always will love. **King Continues on:** Civilizations might rise and fall, but God[']s love will be here. Empires might crumble and perish, but God's love will be here. Even **he says** there might be a day when the stars cease to bedeck the heavens, but the love of God will be here. Man's love might waver and even dry up, but God's love will be here. God's love is eternal...*

1. **Then King says,** *God's love has breath. It is all inclusive. It[']s a big love; its a broad love... **and that** Jesus came on the scene saying "our Father" meaning*

*that he is everybody's Father. God's love is too broad to be limited to a particular race. **He says** It is too big to be wrapped in a particularistic garment. It is too great to be encompassed by any single nation. **He says,** God is a universal God. This fact has been a ray of hope and has given a sense of belonging to hundreds of disinherited people...*

Long before Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream, he had a faith. He had a faith steeped in a God who loves us so very much that he gave his son to us so that we might see in Jesus of Nazareth's life and ministry, so that we might see in Jesus of Nazareth nailed to the cross on Calvary, so that we might see in Jesus Christ, risen from the grave on that third day, so that we might see what true, self-giving, self-offering, self-sacrificing love feels like-- looks like. As Dr. King said in that sermon so many decades ago:

*The scene on Calvary is more than a meaningless drama that took place on an earthly stage, but it is a telescope through which we look out into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking forth into time. It is God's way of saying to wayward man, "Come home I still love you." ...*

**He concludes by saying,** Paul was right. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God."

May we this day, also turn our eyes to the cross. In our meditations these next few weeks, in the midst of partisan strife in this land and annihilating retribution in the Holy Land may we focus our fears and tears, may we model our actions and prayers on the One who says, "Those who do what is true come to the light..." May we seek God's love. May we offer God's care. May we dare to believe.