

Lifted Up

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Too often, we live as if we were not loved. Too often, we live as if we were condemned. And so, we skulk around in the shadows, looking for crumbs of meaning in our lives because we don't believe that we are heirs to the universe, God's beloved ones. We choose the dark because we are afraid the light will expose our failings. Both the conversation we've been having in Sunday School with Jules Butler and my current reading of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's posthumous classic, Ethics, have reminded me of the universality of the experience captured in the tale of Adam and Eve in Genesis. At some point in our lives, we realize we have a choice between right and wrong and sooner or later we choose wrong. And then we are ashamed. We hide from God. We scuttle into the dark. Connie and I spent several years living in Houston, where cockroaches are an issue no matter how clean you keep your house. And if you live in apartment where your neighbors are less fastidious, well... We never quite got used to the spectacle of walking into the kitchen or bathroom at night and turning on the light and watching the cockroaches scurry for cover. They couldn't stand the light. I don't know whether or not God loves cockroaches. I suppose so, because scientists tell us they are likely to inherit the earth. But I know that God loves us and forgives us and wants us to come into the light of God's love. And I know that God gives us a choice but that many, many people choose to live in the dark because they don't understand that they are already forgiven, that God truly loves them, loves them so much that God Godself became flesh and suffered and died to show how much God loves all of God's creation.

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defeat, and sorrow. But I am convinced that the promise of Jesus about salvation relates to this world and this life as well. The life of the ages, which is famously promised to us in John 3:16 and usually translated “everlasting life,” is to be lived here and now in the presence of God. It is important for us to remember and to claim the promise that “God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” And although salvation does indeed refer to the life to come, it is equally important that it be lived out now, that we stop living as if we were condemned and start living the truth that we are unbelievably loved, *so* loved.

Too often, we live as if we were not loved. Too often, we live as if we were condemned. And so, we skulk around in the shadows, looking for crumbs of meaning in our lives because we don't believe that we are heirs to the universe, God's beloved ones. We choose the dark because we are afraid the light will expose our failings. Both the conversation we've been having in Sunday School with Jules Butler and my current reading of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's posthumous classic, Ethics, have reminded me of the universality of the experience captured in the tale of Adam and Eve in Genesis. At some point in our lives, we realize we have a choice between right and wrong and sooner or later we choose wrong. And then we are ashamed. We hide from God. We scuttle into the dark. Connie and I spent several years living in Houston, where cockroaches are an issue no matter how clean you keep your house. And if you live in apartment where your neighbors are less fastidious, well... We never quite got used to the spectacle of walking into the kitchen or bathroom at night and turning on the light and watching the cockroaches scurry for cover. They couldn't stand the light. I don't know whether or not God loves cockroaches. I suppose so, because scientists tell us they are likely to inherit the earth. But I know that God loves us and forgives us and wants us to come into the light of God's love. And I know that God gives us a choice but that many, many people choose to live in the dark because they don't understand that they are already forgiven, that God truly loves them, loves them so much that God Godself became flesh and suffered and died to show how much God loves all of God's creation.

Jesus said, “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have the life of the ages.” And so, his enemies lifted him up on a cross and we count down the Sundays before we observe that tragedy that came on a Friday that we call Good. We call it Good Friday because his death was not the end but only the beginning, the beginning of a glorious new existence for creation that dawned on Easter Sunday. That's when God lifted Jesus up from death, lifted him up for life and exaltations. And we lift him up by continuing to exalt and praise and trust him for our own lives. And still, my sisters and my brothers, we are called to lift him up in yet another way. Now that we have discovered the secret to the life of the ages, we are called to share that secret with others. Now that we have lifted him up and he has brought joy, joy, joy to our souls, we are called to show others how to do the same. The whole world thinks they know what John 3:16 is about. They think it's about heaven and it is. But remember, this week, that even more than that it's about love, God's love offered freely to all. It's about coming out of the dark into the light of that love. Ask your neighbors this week if they know about that famous verse. Tell them your crazy pastor said it was about something different. Tell them that God loves them. Tell them they don't have to live as if they are condemned because they are already forgiven for every mistake they ever made, every thoughtless thing they ever did, every lie they've told, every heart they've broken. Tell

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them and see if it doesn't bring even more joy to your soul. Help them find healing and see if you don't feel even more well yourself. Tell them they are loved and bring them to the cross. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.