

**“WHY?”**  
***John 3:1-17***

One of the local high schools has a regular “Thought For The Week” which is displayed around the school and discussed in tutor groups. Last week’s was “*The important thing is not to stop questioning.*” On one of these little inspirational sayings on a notice board in the school someone had added “*Why?*” Good question! And a question which seems always to be being asked by small children – Why? Why? Why?

And you too may be asking it this morning. Why are we here today? Why are these two people doing this? Well, we’ve heard a bit of their story during the service and we could keep asking why? And if we keep asking that question we will probably get back to something along the lines of “because God sent Jesus into this world.” That’s why they’re doing what they’re doing – they are responding, in this rather dramatic way, to God’s extremely dramatic intervention in the affairs of humanity.

But there’s always another why. Why did God send Jesus into this world? Well, we’ve just read a bit about that in the words we heard from John’s account of Jesus’ life, John’s Gospel, chapter 3. And he tells us quite clearly what Jesus did **not** come to do. In the last sentence we heard, John writes: “*God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world.*” Jesus didn’t come to condemn us – which is what many people, unfortunately, think it’s all about. They have – maybe you have – an image of a God who is just itching to blast us into oblivion, who is constantly angry, raging against men and women for their wickedness.

But God didn’t do that – he didn’t need to do that, to send Jesus to condemn us – because there’s plenty of that in the world already. Why should he add to that in a world which is full of condemnation, full of criticism, full of judgementalism? So many people are bowed down under the weight of that as it is. Maybe at work – you can never do enough. The boss is never satisfied, the shareholders are never satisfied, the government are never satisfied. You’ve always got to work harder. There’s always someone there to criticise you – either to your face or in your performance management interview or your appraisal or whatever. You come home feeling condemned.

And that may be no better – when you get home. Your friends and family point out your shortcomings. Things are never quite right. You end up drained by your responsibilities, never really succeeding in getting your head above water, let alone keeping it above water. Parents seem always to be doing you down: children always want more: spouses demand what you can’t deliver.

Much of it is fuelled by the media which plays on the need we all seem to have to pick holes in everything, to knock off pedestals those whom we have only just set up on them. Newspapers are full of complaints and criticisms. Television programmes relentlessly expose those who don't come up to the mark. Magazines are packed with stories of celebrities and ordinary people who have failed.

And for many people the Church seems to be part of this great conspiracy to condemn everything and everyone. To many outsiders – and, indeed, many insiders – it's all about “Thou-shalt-not”, about getting it wrong, about being less than perfect, about sin. Those who go to church are seen as “holier-than-thou”, looking down their spiritual noses at the poor unfortunates who just cannot do it right.

We condemn each other. We condemn ourselves. And we end up being drained by it all, always failing, always missing the mark. In fact, the Greek word translated “sin” in our Bibles literally means “missing the target”. We're never good enough – we need to try harder, work harder, look better, spend more. And even when we do, we still end up dissatisfied, condemned. It's all a long way away from what we believe life is really supposed to be about – life in all its fullness. That's what Jesus says, elsewhere in John's Gospel, that he came to offer humanity – *“I've come that they might have life and have it to the full.”*

No. God did not send Jesus to condemn the world. In fact, he sent Jesus to do exactly the opposite. This is how Eugene Peterson translates this verse in his paraphrase *The Message*:

*“God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it is. He came to help, to put the world right again.”*

Jesus actually came to save us, to save us from the consequences of all that kind of thing, to offer us an alternative to the constant battering of condemnation and self-condemnation. This sentence doesn't actually say what we're saved from, and really what it boils down to is that we are saved from being ourselves, from being those people who are so aware that we're not perfect that we end up in this spiral of condemnation. God loves us and wants to change all that. As one writer put it (D A Carson), *“God's love is to be admired not because the world is so big and includes so many people, but because the world is so bad.”* Now, you may protest that that's just another expression of condemnation, but it's not. God really does want to change the situation, not to rub our noses in it.

Back to the question again – Why? Well, we've just said, and it's in the verse before this one, a verse that's very familiar to many people. God loves us. He doesn't want us to wither and perish, to shrivel up under the weight of condemnation. He wants us all to have the opportunity to experience eternal life – the fullness of life now and a guaranteed future with him after this life is over. Jesus didn't come into a neutral world to save some people and condemn others: he came into a lost world, a world that is swirling

with the forces of evil, to give everyone a chance to know God's salvation. God loves you. You matter to him. He wants you to know the joy, the peace, the comfort, the assurance of his love. He wants you to realise that it's not a question of just trying harder all the time, trying to do that bit better and so impress those who would otherwise condemn.

So, a change of question – How? How can we have this eternal life? Well, John tells us here in *v16*:

*“For 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.”*

There's the key – believe in Jesus. Accept that it's true. Rely on him and not on your own efforts, because you'll never feel you're good enough anyway. In these sentences there are two fundamental alternatives. Firstly between condemnation and salvation, between a constant losing battle to impress and satisfy others and the deep assurance of knowing that because of what Jesus has done you're good enough for God, whatever anyone else says. And secondly between rejection and belief, between deciding that you want to keep trying on your own and accepting that Jesus has actually sorted it all out for you.

In the end, that's why these two people are going through this today, because they believe that Jesus has done it for them and they want other people to know that. Just as for them, the choice is yours: you can decide to plod on, ploughing your own furrow, struggling day after day to get it right. Or you can decide to give Jesus a try and accept what he's done for you, surrendering your life to him and believing that he can make a difference to you now and for eternity. I reckon there's no contest – and if you decide to turn down the offer that Jesus makes, all I can say to you is “Why?”