

Wednesday, March 10, 2010

The World and My Little Box

John 3:16 - "...For God so loved **the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

When was the last time you were really shocked, when your presuppositions about someone that you thought you knew were found to be entirely false?

Sometimes this happens in a negative way --when the person that you thought you knew turned out to be a bit more sinister than what you first thought. At other times, we are pleasantly surprised, when a negative impression is met with some refreshing revelations of goodness.

Years ago, one of the staff persons at the elementary school that my children attended was someone that I was sure needed to be closed in my box with the following presuppositions: distant, judgmental, aloof, radical liberal, atheist, and on and on. After several years of being quite certain that my box was sound and accurate, I met the woman at a fundraiser for a local Christian organization.

So much for my box.

When Jesus spoke the words from John 3:16, He was speaking to a seasoned Jewish rabbi. Nicodemus had been a leader in the Sanhedrin – that ruling class of 70 Jewish elders – the very same ones who would put Jesus on trial, and later insure that He was crucified. We are first shocked by this because we're pretty sure that the Sanhedrin are bunch of corrupt power-hungry religious leaders, who have only their own agenda at heart. But Nicodemus appears as a sensitive, thoughtful, and humble religious leader. He does not fit our mold.

But later Jesus challenges him to break his own mold.

True religion, Jesus asserts, is not about getting better at "goodness," (defined as trying to do the right thing), but it is, instead, about being reborn through faith in Christ.

For Nicodemus, this rebirth meant that being Jewish wouldn't cut it. And more shocking than that, Jesus starts talking about God loving "the world!"

We get the sense that Nicodemus left that night, a little bit befuddled, and in no way having fully embraced what Jesus had taught. But those radical truths would ferment in Nicodemus' heart, and we would find him and another Sanhedrin member courageously asking Pontius Pilate for the body of Jesus to be buried in one of their own graves.

I am continuously discovering that God's box is far bigger than mine. And He has chosen to love every single person that was ever born. In fact, if you read Romans 8, you could say that God loved the *universe*, not just the world. Maybe we just better get rid of our box and learn to love everyone.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in our self-righteousness we would like to put other people in our own little box of pre-judgment or prejudice. Help us to see every single person with the eyes of love. Teach us through experience that You can change people and make them children of Your kingdom in Your eternal family. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.

--Pastor Foote