

For God so loved the world...

Although this passage reads as an extension of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus the words are not Jesus' but the Gospel writer's. This is his commentary on what Jesus has said to Nicodemus, formulated in the light of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension which have now taken place. John explains both what drove God to give his only Son for the world, and its significance for the world. It is as though he is writing from a heavenly perspective, akin to that from which we view Salvador Dali's *Crucifixion*.



Sometimes ambiguity in language can lead to confusion, but other times it can enhance what is said, giving a richer and fuller meaning. In my view John 3.16 is a divinely inspired example of the latter. Moreover the ambiguity of the Greek is not lost in translation; it is maintained in the English "for God so loved."

The sense is of both quantity and quality. God's love for the world he made is so great that he would stop at nothing to save it. In fact he was prepared to sacrifice his only Son for its redemption. There is no greater degree of love known to humanity.

At the same time John wants us to realise the significance of *how* God expressed that supreme love. Love can be expressed in all kinds of ways, but to express it in this way – by giving up the one dearest to you – is to express it in the most costly way. Jesus' love led him to die for our sins; there is no greater distortion of that love than to bless sin in its name.

The implications of rejecting this degree of love, and this kind of love,

are huge, producing a grief that only a parent who has been rejected by his/her child can fully know. And note, God's love was for the whole *cosmos*, the whole of his creation, not just people. To justify the despoiling of God's creation on the basis of God's love for us is another distortion of God's love.

Just as it is inconceivable that loving parents, who have gladly sacrificed all for their children, would turn around and condemn them, so it is inconceivable that God would want to condemn his world or anyone in it. The truth is that God's children, in their evil, reject him and his love. They do so by rejecting Jesus. Even then, it's not that he condemns them but that they condemn themselves.

John again employs the metaphor of light and darkness. When Jesus was crucified he took all the world's sin (darkness) upon himself. This is what Dali portrays. When the world's darkness is lifted up with Jesus upon the cross, then the light floods back in. It is like the first day of a new creation, waiting to be filled with God's created beings, including all who will come to Jesus - the light of the world.

To ponder

Why do many find it so hard to accept Jesus as the Son of God, and the complete manifestation of God's love?

To pray

Loving heavenly Father, I bow my knees before you, praying that your love may dwell in my heart; and that all people will come to know the breadth, length, height and depth of your love in Christ Jesus. Amen

Reflection