

*14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”*

The night was dark. I was young, ten or twelve or fourteen. On that late summer night I had stayed at Scott's house far beyond the usual time for never before had I faced the field between our houses in darkness. The alfalfa that perennially grew in that field wasn't very tall at that time. I walked at first, then ran. Afraid of beast, of spirit, of intruder lurking in the night, I ran not wanting my feet even to touch the ground. I could not look back, for I would see what was surely there. I ran until I burst into our yard, into the safety of the light which burned brightly there. I caught my breath, then walked confidently into the house to greet my parents.

There was no danger that night. No bears or rattlesnakes lurking there in Avery, Ohio. There were no prowlers out waiting to snatch a young boy, no evil spirits ready to whisk me away. Yet those things that were not, that had no existence, ruled over me. Fear of them owned my heart on my journey home.

I think of my racing through the field as I hear the promise God speaks to us today.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent his son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned.”

I trust you all know the first part of this passage by heart. The message that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life, is the whole gospel in miniature. Our heavenly Father sent his only Son into our world, born of Mary, the almighty God became one of us - as human as you and I are human. But unlike every other human that has lived, Jesus did not grasp hold of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He trusted in his Heavenly Father, as we humans were

created to do. What God spoke Jesus lived, not grabbing hold of forbidden fruit as Adam, and me and you. Jesus never feared the sound of God walking in the garden as Adam and me, and you do when we have something to hide. Jesus lived his earthly life constantly in his Father's presence.

When it was his Father's will that Jesus should suffer, he did not go to that suffering screaming and kicking, nor trembling in fear, but in faith. "Your will be done," he prayed. And he waited, through mocking and spitting and whipping, through nailing and tearing of his flesh, and suffocating weight of crucifixion, he waited. And when every human hope was extinguished by the darkness of death, he waited still for the light of his Father's new day. One human life lived by the divine Son of God, as an offering for the whole world. You, who believe in Jesus who gave his life for you, shall not perish but have everlasting life. Everything that was lost by Adam Christ has gained back. Everything that you and I have lost by our sin, Christ has won back through his sinless suffering.

And so we read, "He who believes in him is not condemned."

You are not condemned. Do you believe that? As you cling to Christ you are not condemned. The thoughts and the words and the deeds that would accuse you and shame you and hold you in fear, in Christ have no existence.

I am not condemned. I know that yet I still race in fear through the darkness. Sins that I have never confessed to another human being, shame that I am so afraid that others will see, feelings that I fear make me unworthy to be a child of God, these are the beasts and spirits lurking in the field of my life.

"And this is the judgment," John writes, "that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil, For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be seen that his deeds have been wrought in God."

Faith is our coming to the light. Believing in Jesus Christ as our Lord is leaving behind the racing through the darkness in fear and resting ourselves in the certain knowledge that now we are not condemned. What if you see me now, as I am, if I let you see my whole life as it has been? Will you condemn me, will you be ashamed to acknowledge me as brother, to stand beside me?

God calls us to be a community standing in the light. We are called to be a people honest before God and honest before one another. The alternative is constantly running away from things that don't exist, fear our only Lord in the darkness. In Christ you are not condemned. You will not perish, but have eternal life. God sent his only Son because he so loved the world, and me and you.

Out of love he wants us no longer to be afraid, not of our sins, not of our shame, not of our death. Forgiveness, the honor of being his children, and eternal life are his gifts to you.

With all your heart believe. For when you believe in Christ you stand safely in the light. The running and the fleeing are over. You are safe at home.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. He who believes in him is not condemned.” Amen.