

*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 other night we experienced a most rare moment at our house. Sue and I, Beth and Katie sat at the table and played cards. No one was rushing off to practice, or to work. No one was hurrying to clean the kitchen or grade papers. No one was on their way to a game or babysitting or a date. No one was looking at a clock. We were together.

I thought: everything else is about this: to be together in love. When my earthly life is over what will matter to me except the love I received, the love I gave. So why is my life so full of rushing and pushing and doing that there is no time for love?

Maybe that is the thought that God had a long time ago. God looked and realized that God had been so busy giving orders and arranging history and forgiving sins, and hearing prayers that there was no time to be with the ones God loved.

For God so loved the world. What sort of a God is this who looks down on a world of thousands of millions of peoples and loves everyone - knows everyone by name - even the sparrows. My mind cannot stretch far enough to even begin to think about such a God.

What sort of a God is this who loves the Jewish man spraying the mosque with death, and loves the Palestinians who are torn by the bullets from this man's gun?

What sort of God who loves the woman who abuses her own self with drugs, abuses the child she carries in her womb, and loves the helpless child?

What sort of God who loves the policeman who beats the prisoner, and the prisoner who is beaten?

What sort of God is this who can love the fetus that is aborted even as God loves the physician who performs the abortion?

“For God so loved the world,” John tells us. Not some globe, some planet but people, all the people loved by God.

How could God gather all the people around one table - one family together?

For love is the point of it all. All creation, all life and living, all history and wealth and power and glory, everything finds its purpose and meaning, its beginning and end in the words, for God so loved the world.

That he gave his only Son.

For one reason God sent Jesus to our world, to gather.

Through his giving his life, Jesus gathers the family. "I, when I am lifted up," said Jesus, "will draw all people to myself."

Like the bronze serpent Moses put on the pole Jesus overcomes all that poisons life. Sin, death, evil are all powerless over those who look up to the dying one.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

God wants all God's children with God forever.

This is eternal life, the family gathered around the table in love.

Forever.

That's how it is with the whole world. But now let's talk about me and you.

What serpents are sinking their fangs into me? Into you? What sorts of poisons are within me? Within you? Why am I only content to gather with the family if I am the center of attention? Why do caring and sharing seem so boring, sin so attractive? Why do I want to measure my happiness by my having more and better than my neighbor?

God loves the world. That's a nice thought.

All the family gathered at the table, that's a nice thought too.

But winning, and having most and proving I'm better, that's what really makes me happy.

I won at the card game the other night when we were all gathered around the table. I won. Is that part of why the night was so special for me?

O how the serpents bite has poisoned my life. And yours too, I think. Like children of Israel doomed by the bite of fiery serpents we are dying. But now not a serpent but the only Son is before my eyes.

I look at Jesus. He is stronger than the poisons in me - stronger than sin - stronger than death for he is God's love for me.

Look at Jesus lifted up on the cross. Believe in him with your whole heart. Though serpents of pride and greed and envy and vanity fill you with their poison, know that Jesus can neutralize them all. Look at Jesus.

What sort of God is this who loves us all? God is the sort of God that gives his only Son for us.

Jesus is God's love for you. Look to Jesus.