

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
March 15, 2015**

John 3:16-18

Only One Hope

**Hymns: *Lamb of God* - 714 –
Distribution: 391, 100
Closing: 114, vs. 6,7**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

¹⁶ “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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. John 3:16-18

In the 1970’s and 80’s, a man by the name of Rollen Stewart achieved a certain level of fame. And while you might not know the man by his name, if you watched any major sporting event during those years, from the World Series to the Super Bowl to the Olympics, you most likely know Rollen Stewart from his actions. Rollen Stewart achieved notoriety by strategically placing himself in view of the camera during national, and even world-wide, television events. While on camera, people noticed Rollen, who was also known as the “Rainbow Man.” They noticed him because of the rainbow afro wig that he wore, but also because of the message he proclaimed (Hold John 3:16 sign).

If you know anything else about Rollen Stewart, you know that he was a bit misguided in his views and beliefs, but he knew one thing; he knew John 3:16 and he knew that people

needed to hear the message that this verse of the Bible pro-claimed. And as we look today at the most familiar words of the Bible, we too want to be reminded of that simple message and what it means: There is only one hope.

It is a fact that has always been denied by many throughout human history, but it remains a truth nonetheless: Eternity is real. When a person dies, it is not the end. The body returns to the earth, but the soul returns to God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7). There in the presence of God after their death, each person receives a decree of judgment that determines where they will spend eternity (Hebrews 9:27). And God is clear. There will be some, there will be many who are sent to the eternal grave, as it’s called in the Old Testament.

Hell is a place of torment and agony; a place filled with weeping and gnashing of teeth; a place of separation from anything good. This Hades was prepared for the devil and those angels who disobeyed God in the beginning; and sin and disobedience of God continue to be the tickets that guarantee entry into that eternal existence of wrath. For those who reject God and push away his Word and the promises that it contains, Jesus speaks clearly about the result: there will be condemnation. Eternal death is real.

As much as people want to deny it, the actions of every civilization and generation show us that people know that eternity is real. It is why Pharaohs built pyramids; it’s why Mayans sacrificed their children; it’s why Muslims become jihadists; they are trying to find hope for eternity; they are trying to find answers for what their conscience tells them is coming.

While mankind comes up with proposed solutions to death and eternity in every generation, Jesus’ clear-cut words in John 3 continue to announce to people that there is only one hope for eternal life. And that hope is following the plan laid out by God. The one who sets the demands; the one who controls eternity; the one who carries out the justice; is also the one who so loved the world that he was willing to bring forth, and carry out, a solution that would actually work.

The one and only plan of hope would be carried out by the one and only Son of God, whom ***“God did not send into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”*** (John 3:17). He would do that saving work by satisfying the demands of God that man could not. Born under the burden of obedience to the laws of God, the Son would follow the laws with the perfection that God expected from his people.

And then he would also meet God’s demand for justice. There was nothing that could take away wages of sin being death besides death. And so the one and only Son, the one and only hope would die. He would offer his life on a tree; he would offer his life to God. And by meeting God’s standard of perfection and by satisfying God’s need for justice, Jesus accomplished what God sent him to do, the one and only hope be-came the one and only Savior.

That message is there in one verse, John 3:16, the Gospel in a nutshell, the good news in one package. And concerning that message, Jesus gives two calls. First, he calls us to believe that message. In order to have that hope, that Savior, that life that is promised in these words; what does Jesus say? On man’s side, the proposition is simple: Just believe. To solve problems and find solutions, we are used to procedures, we expect to put in work. But here Jesus lays out something much clearer, much easier: “Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life...whoever believes in him is not condemned.”

And once we believe that message, Jesus gives us the second call. He calls us to share the message. Take the Gospel to all those people in this world, all those people in your lives that need this one hope that is different from every other. According to John 3:16, there is only one hope for mankind. And that is a message that every person in this world needs to know. And Jesus has given us simple ways to share it.

In 2009, a quarterback playing in the college football National Championship game put a modern twist on Rollen Stewart’s method. On the eye black under his eyes, Tim Tebow wrote John 3:16, ensuring that every time the TV cameras came in for a close-up, people would

be directed to the Gospel in a nutshell. And the result? John 3:16 became the top internet search in the United States. If you know anything else about Tim Tebow, then you know his theology, and his quarterbacking aren’t the greatest. But like Rollen, he knew one thing: he knew John 3:16 and he knew that it is a message that people need to hear if they are going to find the only hope in the world.

As those who have been called to share, we often make it harder than it is, don’t we? For us, it is just a simple declaration that Jesus has asked to make; it can be as easy as pointing people to John 3:16. Once there, God does the rest, as he proclaims through the straightforward words of his Son what he has done for all mankind. There is only one hope for mankind; one hope to avoid eternal condemnation; one hope to have eternal life. And that is the message for us to believe; that is the message for us to share! Amen.