John 3:14-21

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.’\*

Keeping Your Eyes on Jesus

There’s a verse that we read this morning that is worth memorizing. It’s like the pledge of allegiance or the Girl Scout Promise – you should be able to say it without even trying. That verse is John 3:16. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life.* The verse I may look old (others here may look even older), but I know that even though I’m gonna keep getting older, and someday I won’t be alive here, that I live forever with Jesus. Easter is about him coming out from the grave, and telling us that if we believe in him, we also have everlasting life. But believing means you are on a journey with him. It’s not like jumping through a hoop; you *believe* and you’re finished. Believing is not like *saying*  a pledge. It’s about *living* a pledge. Believing in Jesus means living the life that he wants us to live. It means obeying him.

There seems to be some bad news in today’s scripture reading as well. Jesus goes on to say that if we believe in him, we’ll do good deeds. But do we always do good deeds? Are you able to be nice to everyone all the time? I remember in the fourth grade, I was class president. Everyone in the class expected me to be a good example, to do the right thing. And in my school, when you did something wrong, you got a demerit, and when you got five demerits, you had to go to the honor council, and the principal was in charge of that honor council. Well, before the year was over, guess who had gotten five demerits? Me! And I had to go in front of the principal and the honor council. I was scared. I was crying. I was *class president*, but I had done enough bad things to warrant my appearance in front of the principal and my peers.

We’re kind of mixed up: we do good things most of the time, but not all the time; we help people most of the time, but not all of the time. When I think of God judging me, I feel the same way. I may do the right thing most of the time, I may try to help people most of the time, but I still manage to earn some demerits over time. I’m not always good and loving and caring. Jesus says that if we do good deeds, we are children of God (or children of the light), but if we do bad things, we are children of darkness).So if I’m sometimes good and sometimes bad, how do I know if I know if I am a child of the light or a child of darkness?

It’s important to ask ourselves this question. If you never ask yourself that question, you probably aren’t a child of light or a child of God. But if you ask God in prayer, “God, am I doing what is right? Am I pleasing you?” it means that you are seeking God. At least you’re looking in the right direction. You have to ask God again and again and again, “Am I doing what’s right?”

But God tells me often that I am *not* doing the right thing. That’s right. Sometimes I do the wrong thing. Sometimes I would rather go to the beach than help a friend fix his car.

Sometimes I would rather NOT answer the phone when it rings, because I can see who’s calling and I don’t want to talk to that person. Sometimes I still get demerits.

And getting demerits scares me, because if I get demerits with God, I have to wonder if I really am believing in Jesus.

When I start having those fears and doubts about my standing with God, I remember that Jesus says, “God loves the world so much (and the world means you and me and everyone and everything) that he gave his son to die for us.” And he died for us even though we are the way that we are; he died for us even though we have a lot of demerits. God loves us that much, even if we have been bad, and this should make us feel good. And when someone is that nice to you, it makes you want to be nice right back at that person, right? So I’m not going to do my best not to get any more demerits, to obey Jesus and show him that I believe in him. But then I fall again and show my selfishness and fail to love and serve my neighbor, and then I wonder how I stand with God, and then I remember how much he loves me…and you see where this is going, right? We keep making this big circle.

But something good is happening through all of this; WE KEEP COMING BACK TO JESUS. Whenever we sin, we must ask ourselves, “Have I pleased God?” and we must approach our Lord for the answer. The Old Testament lesson today mentions how all these Israelites were bitten by poisonous snakes because of their sins, and God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole, and whoever looked upon it would not die. Jesus tells us that he’s like that snake on the pole. HOW? Even though we are bitten by snakes, even though we have a bad habit of sinning, doing what’s wrong, and we should get into trouble for our demerits, if we keep looking at Jesus we be okay. We will have life, and life eternal. If every time we do something bad, we go to Jesus and say, “I’ve been bad,” we learn more and more how much he loves us, and we might love him a little bit more each time we experience God’s grace.

Almost everyone we read about in the Bible has a story like yours and like mine. Here are people who are both good and bad, faithful and treacherous. What we learn is how God picks each of these people up off the ground again and again, brushes the dirt off of them, and helps them on their way. If we keep our eyes on Jesus, he will help us along our way as well.