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“For God So Loved the World”

By Edgar F. Solís

John 3:1-17

God always express love and compassion for everyone... God speaks to everyone... many years ago I participated in a missionary training... part of the experience demanded the reading of the fascinating book Child Peace by Don Richardson.

In 1962 Don and Carol Richardson, Canadian missionaries began serving among the cannibalistic Sawi tribes of western New Guinea (modern Irian Jaya).

Now the Sawi honored treachery as an ideal. They befriended people of other villages with the intent of later betraying, killing and even eating them. The first time Don Richardson shared the story of Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus, the Sawi admiringly proclaimed Judas the hero of the story! The Richardsons ministered to a pair of neighboring villages, Haenam and Kamur, that were constantly warring against each other. When, after several months, the Richardsons were not able to convince the two settlements to stop fighting, they announced that they would have to move elsewhere to minister. The Sawi, not wanting to lose the benefits to be gained by having them, suddenly declared that they were going to make peace with each other. The Richardsons wondered how such peace could possibly be established, given the long history of hatred, treachery and distrust that existed between the villages.

The crucial outcome of this fascinating story is presented when the enemy tribes make a pact, the tribes exchange an infant between them as sign of peace...they called this the “peace child” each tribe would pledge to take care of the child of the enemy tribe and thus safeguard peace between the two groups.

Don Richardson feared that harm might come to the infants who had been given to the enemy villagers. But he was assured that those children would be carefully protected so peace could continue between the two settlements. When Richardson asked why all this was necessary, the Sawi answered, "You've been urging us to make peace. Don't you know it's impossible to have peace without a peace child?"

"Richardson went on to use that deeply rooted cultural tradition as a "redemptive analogy" of God's having sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile God's enemies to the Divine, thus establishing peace between forgiven people and holy God. That peace child analogy, in fact, served as the basis of the breakthrough in the Sawis' understanding that led many of them to have faith in Christ."

This week's passage contains arguably the most famous verse in the New Testament, John 3:16, a citation frequently seen on placards at sporting events and other public gatherings, in graffiti along roadsides. Martin Luther called John 3:16 "the gospel in miniature".

According to the Bible blog commentary "This verse presents us with an excellent opportunity to clarify how we conceive God's love and justice, and what Christian good news is really all about. The phrase "gave his only Son" reminds us of the harrowing story of Abraham and Isaac, in which God calls on Abraham to give his "only son" as a burnt offering. As it turns out, the instruction is a divine "test" to see whether Abraham's fidelity and devotion to God are genuine or driven by self-interest (Gen 22:1). It is as if God asked Abraham 'Are you truly devoted to me - or merely to the promise of a great legacy?' The instruction to sacrifice Isaac "tests" the depths of Abraham's devotion - and indeed, the ordeal shows his devotion is extravagant and true. By alluding to this story, Jesus is signaling that God's devotion to humankind is likewise

extravagant and true, and that Jesus' mission - his life, death, and resurrection - should be understood accordingly.

Takeaways:

1) As we move through Lent toward Holy Week, this passage provides a powerful reference to the story of Abraham and Isaac ("gave his only Son") points to the cross and resurrection as signs of God's extravagant faithfulness and devotion to humanity. In short, God loves "in this way" (*houtos*): graciously, mercifully, faithfully, devotedly and universally, for the sake of "the world" (*kosmos*).

2) What we are charged to do is to proclaim again and again the good news of God's extravagant love and mercy for "the world" without exception, indeed for "all the families of the earth" (John 3:16; Gen 12:3).

3) Let's remember the Peace Child story. I invite you to think about how are we communicating the Good News to others. God can use your life to speak and communicate to others the immense love of God. God can also speak to us when we pay attention and listen to others people's stories. Where and who are the people that will receive the good news from our lips, testimonies and works? I invite you to get excited because God will bring people into your life this very week if you are willing to share the Good News of God with them! May God speak through you and me. May God use us today and during the week to share with others that God so loved the world, the entire world, Amen!