



March 9-10-11, 2024 – Lent 3

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Text: John 3: 14-18

Sermon Theme: **I Am So Glad God Kissed a Frog**

***<sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,<sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.***<sup>[a]</sup>

***<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3: 14-18)***

Dear Friends of Jesus,

I have some good news for you and some bad news. The bad news is this: when we gather together for Saturday/Sunday/Monday worship, as the family of faith, we rarely get the opportunity to properly greet each other. Sometimes it's because we don't feel comfortable enough to go up to someone we've don't know and say: "Hi, my name is ... What's yours?" Other times, it's because we're often rushing into church before the first hymn starts.

Well, the good news is there's been a suggestion how to solve this problem with a brand new church custom we can start next week. Here's the suggestion: ***Take this opportunity to kiss the person in the church pew either in front of you or in back of you.*** Wait a minute. Not everyone on board with this yet? Kissing someone in church isn't necessarily a bad thing. Actually, it's a Bible thing. St. Paul wrote Bible letters to Christian believers in cities like Corinth, Rome, and Thessalonica. St. Peter wrote Bible letters to believers in Asia, Bithynia, and Cappadocia. Both Bible writers tended to write at the end of their letters: "greet each another with a holy kiss." Maybe you didn't know this, but historically, the holy kiss was a regular part of the worship service of the early Christian church. It was a special welcome. And even today, there are churches that retain this custom.

Kisses can be a beautiful symbol of love. But, by the looks of some of your faces, I have to agree with you: I'm not too keen about this holy kissing either. It may be a normal way for men and women to greet each other in some parts of the world. But, in our Western culture, kissing can send mixed signals. Now, maybe you've had a bad experience with kissing someone you'd rather not. Mom might've told you: "Now give Aunt Bertha a kiss." And Aunt Bertha turns and plants a nice juicy one right on your lips. EEWWWH. Maybe you've even wiped your mouth after your lips touched something repulsive. Do I need to tell you: kissing a frog is often associated as a

disgusting habit to avoid? Now, you might begin to understand why this sermon is called: **I Am So Glad God Kissed a Frog**. It's not a pretty picture – puckering up to a slimy, wart-infested creature. And yet, that's the picture, St. John gives us in our sermon text when he reminds us how God sent His Son Jesus to kiss us with His salvation. The surprising truth is that we are the unlikely recipients of His loving affection in the words of John, chapter 3. Don't shy away from God when He speaks to you today. Instead, draw closer to His eternal embrace because His holy kiss is like any good fairy tale ending, transforms frogs like us into princes and princesses who are the heirs of eternal life in heaven. By the end of this sermon, I pray when you think of John 3:16, you'll also remember the words of our sermon theme: **I Am So Glad God Kissed a Frog**. Today, we're going to hear how God kissed or greeted our world through His one and only Son, and how He transforms us through faith in that Son.

When I think of frogs, I think of mischievous little boys sneaking slimy creatures into their pockets to scare unsuspecting teachers. They're not ideal for touching let alone kissing with their eyes bugging out, and the old superstition of getting warts if you touch them. Plus frogs live in stagnant, algae-infested muck.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it before, but frogs and their habitats are actually an accurate picture of how you and I live in this sinful world. So often, we don't take time to look into the mirror of God's Word to see the warts that we wear and the muck we live in. We often wear the warts of lying, complaining, the warts of lust, greed, and self-centeredness. So often we cling to our earthly lily-pads of job security, pension plans, and earthly possessions hoping they will be our source of stability. But, if we remain in the warts of our sins, we have no more hope of heaven than a frog in a blender. In fact, we have it worse. Because our sins, we deserve more than a blender – we deserve an eternity separated from God in hell.

Not much attracts us to frogs. And when you think about it, there is nothing that attracted God to us either. How could God ever like our foul, sinful world? How could ever He like us? How could He embrace us when we often turn and run away from Him? John 3:16, the world's most famous Bible passage speaks of God's eternal love for us. Yes, **God so loved the world** and there was only one way to do it: by sending His Son to us. God needed to have a special kind of love. Did you know the Bible speaks of three different kinds of love? The most common kind of love is what's known as a "Phileo" love. The Greek word Phileo is from the common word Philadelphia – which means: the city of brotherly love. This is a friendship love which we have towards each other and is often characterized by the greeting of the holy kiss. The second kind of love is known as "Eros" love. It's where the English word: "Erotic" comes from. This is the special sexual kind of love that husbands and wives express for each other and belongs only in marriage. The final and most important kind of love is known as "Agape" love. Agape love is the highest form of love. It's a self-sacrificing kind of love. And agape love is the only emotion that compelled God to kiss us, as frogs. This agape-kind of love is the love St. John describes in our familiar Bible passage from John 3:16: **God so "agaped" the world that He gave His only and only Son...**

Remember the background of this section of Scripture. Jesus first spoke these words to Nicodemus, a Pharisee or teacher of God's Law who came to Jesus at night for fear of the other Jews. Nicodemus didn't get Jesus. He didn't see His need for Christ. But, Nicodemus did get the Old Testament. He knew about the bronze snake God provided to save His Old Testament people to save them from deadly snake bites. Now, Jesus connected His saving mission to the bronze snake when He said in the opening words: **14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**

God had plenty of reasons to turn away from Nicodemus, and from us. After all we're like frogs. But, in agape love God accepted the unacceptable. He loved the unlovable. And He saved the unsavable. In clear words, Jesus reminds us why He is known as the Son of Man who came to us in the nick of time. **17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.** No frog was left unloved by God's incomparable and incomprehensible agape love. These verses fling God's arms open to our world, to all 7 continents, to all 8+ billion people walking on our planet, and extend God's love to us. Don't get me wrong. God hasn't changed in his disgust over sin. But, because Jesus was lifted up on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for our sins, we are saved eternally. God now welcomes believers home to heaven ... period. The story is told about a young man who argued bitterly with his father, stormed out, and left home. He continued to keep in touch with his mother through letters (because this was the time before cell phones). She wanted him home for Easter. But, he was afraid. He only could come home if he knew His father forgave him. Finally, there was no more time for letters. His mother wrote back and said that she would talk with his father. If he had forgiven him, she would tie a white cloth on the tree which grew along the railroad tracks near their home, which he could see before the train reached the station. If there was no white cloth, it would be better if he moved on. So the young man started home. He was so nervous as the train reached the station, that he could barely look in the direction of the tree. But, when he looked he didn't see one white cloth tied to the tree. He saw white cloths tied to every branch of the tree. The message was clear – he was forgiven. The father accepted his son back. And God has accepted sinners like us back with the saving work of His Son on the cross for us. Yes, **I Am So Glad that God Kissed a Frog through His one and only Son.**

But, the final verse of our reading tells us both good news and bad news. **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.** The good news is that everyone has been kissed by God with salvation and not condemned. The bad news is: not every one wants God's free gift of salvation. And if they don't believe, they lose out on an eternal life in heaven. In fairy tales, what happens when a frog is kissed by the princess? Isn't he transformed? The words of John, chapter 3, remind us that God transforms us into princes and princesses – the royal family of God all through a simple faith in Jesus. But, remember, faith isn't something we do. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that He simply offers us through God's Word and Sacrament. The fact that some reject that faith reminds us that each of us

has that horrible power to reject God's free offer. Don't reject it ... instead, with the heart of a child ... just believe what God has told us. Believe what He has promised in John 3:16. I'd like to sum up the words of John 3:16 this way. It's entitled the "Greatest": **God** ... (who is the greatest one) **so loved** ... (which is the greatest act) **the world** ... (which is the greatest company) **That He gave** ... (which is the greatest generosity) **His one and only Son** ... (who is the greatest sacrifice) **That whoever** ... (which is the greatest opportunity) **believes** ... (which the greatest simplicity) **in him** ... (which the greatest attraction) **will not** ... (which is the greatest certainty) **perish** ... (which the greatest tragedy) **but** ... (which the greatest difference) **have** ... (which is the greatest possession) **eternal** ... (which is the greatest time period) **life** ... (which is the greatest gift).

So as we end this sermon, don't stress out if we should we greet each other with a holy kiss. Instead, let's just stick with a holy handshake, maybe even a holy high-five. But, the best possible news is that God has kissed the frogs of this world through His Son Jesus. As we move closer to Holy Week, let's remember how God has transformed us spiritually right now. And that, my friends, no fairy tale. Amen.