

God so Loves, God Gave, We Believe  
John 3:16  
April 20, 2008 - Pastor Draeger 10AM

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus, Amen.

We're in week 4 or so of the series God loves the world so much, can you say that with me? God loves the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. That's the text, and we're teasing that out in various ways. We've looked so far at how God loves, how God gave and today we look at 'and we believe.' So it's been 3 important components so far, and we want to tease out the idea of we believe.

And as we do that, I'd like to introduce you to a father and son team. Team Hoyt who have traveled through a variety of cities and states throughout the country. They race a lot, they have been involved in 64 marathons, 206 triathlons, 6 triathlons at the iron man's distance, 204 - 10K runs, and since 1975 they've crossed nearly a thousand finish lines including a traversing of the United States from coast to coast. I'd like you to watch this video.

-Video plays -

That's the message of John 3:16, don't run through life alone. You weren't made to run through life alone. You were made to be with God forever. That was His design at creation - that the people that He would create would be with Him forever. But we've inherited a disability called sin. And sin has broken the relationship between us and this Dad, who loves us eternally. And yet Dad would not abandon us into our sin and our deadness - He would bring to us life. He loved so much that He gave His only Begotten Son, His unique Son.

And as we heard last week the word *monogenese*, the word from which we have the English 'only begotten' in another translation. *Monogenesis*, monogenetic, the word from which we get the English word genes or genetics. The unique DNA of God is given to us in His Son Jesus, and so we have life. Our disability of sin keeps us separated from Him, and yet He wouldn't let it stand because He loved so much. And as Dick would do for his son, he would be beside him throughout his life - so our Father, our Dad says, I want to be with you throughout your life. I want to be there even when life turns hard. I want to be with you because I love you so much, and I merely want you to believe in Me. And isn't that what Rick did, he believed in Dad. He believed in Dad's love and Dad's capacity and Dad's strength. Rick could never do it alone and Dad wouldn't do it without him.

And isn't that the message of the Gospel? We can't do it alone, and He wouldn't do it without us. God so loved, He gave. For us it's not a matter of merely knowing that truth, it's also a matter of living with that truth day by day. That's what we call faith. It's not just believing in the God of possibilities, but believing that God does work and is

working, and He's doing it in my life because He loves me and He gave His only Son. And so we say Lord I believe.

Many times today people believe, they certainly believe - they believe in themselves a lot. They try to work hard, they try harder, work longer, dig deeper, self reliance is a value in our culture, isn't it? We do it ourselves, and what this message of this Gospel is about is we can't do this one thing for ourselves. We can do a lot of things well, we can be very competent in many areas, but one area where we have no competency is the area of being able to connect with the God of the universe. No matter how hard we try, we can't do it ourselves, and so we come to the race much as Rick Hoyt did. He brought no physical strength - our spiritual legs likewise have no strength. Our morality has no muscle, because no matter how moral we are, no matter how good we are, no matter how hard we work, the Bible clearly says, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that is righteous, no not one. And His righteous standard is what? Get a 90% on the test of life? No. 95%? No. Well, how about a 99? No. Just as Redeemer School and St Luke's School in Santa Rosa, 99 would be a good score on a test; you'd probably get an A. It doesn't happen that way with God, you don't get an A for getting 99%.

Adam and Eve were doing really well, but they blew it at **ONE** point and it decimated them, and it decimated the planet. So our strength, no matter how good it is, is never going to be good enough. We might be pretty good, but the gap between us and perfection - "be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" - is still large enough that it needs someone to bridge the gap. And what does Jesus do? He fills that gap between us and Him, and He's doing that day after day after day for 7 billion people on the planet. He has filled the gap once and for all by His death and resurrection, and He just wants us to believe that, and act as if it's true. That we take it to heart, that we act as if it's true.

Rick believed in his dad, and they crossed the country. They finished countless races, including iron man races. That's our God - He'll take us to the finish line, too. The finish line is that He'll take us into heaven and the glory of victory. As Paul says, "Through Jesus we are more than conquerors." We get the crown of victory at the end of life. Our good deeds don't carry us across the finish line, but Jesus does. Paul writes in Romans, "To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credit to him as righteousness because of the righteousness of Christ."

We bring what Rick brings, God does what Dick does. He takes us "start to finish" having full responsibility for His people, for us, His children - all because He loves. What an amazing God we have and all it takes is believing. Here's the deal, say it with me, *God loves, God gave, we believe*. That's the deal guys - it's that simple, that we believe day by day.

An Air Force pilot wanted to take a flight, and he told a story later of what happened. He got in the plane and went through his check list as all good pilots do, and if you've been on a commercial airliner you know that while the pilot is waiting he's going through the check list. It doesn't matter how many times he's flown that plane, and that particular

one, not just the model but that plane, every time he's sitting there with his check list and going through it making sure all the things are done right. Well, this fighter jet pilot went through his check list but he forgot to do one thing - he forgot to fasten his seat belt. And the way these things are designed, it's too late once you're in the air. Once you're moving at mock speed, you cannot fasten your seat belt. And the problem with that is, where is your parachute? It's in the seat. So if you're thrust out of that plane, if you're ejected out of that plane at mock speed at several miles altitude, what's going to happen? You're going to do a face plant in the planet at 120 miles an hour, which would not be pretty.

Unfortunately, a lot of people fail to have a seat belt for life. They're not buckled in to the parachute - the parachute of course is Jesus who rescues us. The word *Savior* means to rescue - He's the parachute. And we get to be held into the seat by Him. It's not by what we do. Our security is not in what we do, it's in being attached to Jesus.

Other religions offer other alternatives. Hindu's anticipate multiple reincarnations to get it right through life. Buddhists grade your life based upon the noble truths, and the noble 8-fold path to virtue. Muslims earn their way to Allah by performing the duties of the five pillars of faith. Philosophers just say get it right in terms of your understandings of life. No one though but Jesus buckles you in and makes you secure. He's the One Who takes you; it takes a great leap of faith.

The question is how do you begin to believe? Well, I think most of us know that answer, that we do what young Rick did in the film in his life - he simply let dad be dad. He simply believed in dad's love for him and he acted in that faith. Then when he was 15 years old he said I want to run a race. And dad said, sure we can do that. Because this dad thinks he is able to do this for his son, and we know our Dad knows He is able to do all things for us. If He secures our salvation by His own Son's death and resurrection, He says the rest is easy. And so Paul says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." How's that for an optimist? How's that for faith?

That's in that great chapter of Philippians where Paul also says, "I've learned to be content, regardless of the circumstances." I've learned to be content is a faith statement, and he learned how to do that because, "I know that I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," is the way he concludes the chapter.

And so it is that we live by faith, simply trusting a God who has loved us with this amazing love, and would send His Son to the cross to make up the difference between us and Him. Dad does the work, and son Rick shares the victory. When they crossed the finish line, both of them got the medal. And so it is we share in the Father's victory and we get the medal, we get the crown of life - all because we believe.

It's a matter of trust in the Father's love, the Father's commitment, the Father's sacrifice, and we believe. It's all so simple, it's so simple, all you need to do is say, "Lord, I need You. I'm capable of a lot of things Lord, but I'm not capable of this, here's where I need you to give me life, to give me healing, to give me grace, to give me hope, to give me help for my life. I'm trusting You because You died and rose for me."

This morning as you receive the sacrament of Holy Communion, may you know that God is empowering you and filling you with Himself, with the forgiveness of sin, the empowerment of life, as He offers to you the very body and blood of Jesus for the strengthening of your faith. That you might believe evermore intently this week, that He's got you strapped in. No matter what the threat might be in your daily walk, may you believe in His name, Amen.