**Jesus as the Son of God**

**I want to explore with you this famous line from John’s Gospel. “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.”  Most of us have heard this saying throughout our lives. Yet God told us Jesus was his beloved son, not his only son. God is quoted in Matthew as saying “Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen; My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased; I will put My Spirit upon Him, And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.”**

**There are many quotations saying God’s beloved son, but never God’s only son except the one line in John. In Ephesians it is written, “… to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.” From Hebrews, “So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’”  Mark gave us the quotation we’ve also heard throughout our lifetimes, “and a voice came out of the heaven saying: ‘You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.’”**

**In our world, eighty-three percent of the global population** **has a religious belief system. The majority of these fall under twelve religious groups. We Christians make up only thirty-one percent of the world’s believers.  There is the word “only”, and one phrase in the famous line from John’s Gospel causing endless problems throughout history.  John wrote, “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.”  God called Jesus his beloved son; he never called Jesus his only son.**

**We can look at recent history in our country to know how destructive that one word ONLY has been to so many people. There are Christians who believe Jesus is the only son of God. They also believe if anyone doesn’t believe in Jesus as God’s only son, they’re going to hell.  It makes some sects of Christians aggressive in attempting to make other people believe Jesus is the only son of God. Once I saw a man on his knees in front of an Alzheimer patient, who was in a wheelchair. The man was saying over and over again to the poor soul with Alzheimer’s, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your savior?”  I’m sure the man thought he was doing the Alzheimer patient a favor by attempting to save him from hell and damnation. I know this is an extreme example, but a lot of us have stories similar to this one, reminding us some Christians believe Jesus is the only son of God.**

**The phrase completing this famous quotation from John is     “… so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”  This thought does seem to indicate if you don’t believe in Jesus then you are not going to go to heaven. Yet how about the other fifty-one percent of the world’s population?  Are they doomed to go to hell, even if they never heard of Jesus Christ?  I can understand why John wrote his famous quotation. It was a long   time ago, information about the world’s religions was not readily available.  I’ve been writing sermons most weeks for over nine years now.  Every sermon deepens my belief in a loving God who has many sons teaching various branches of his love to all his children throughout the world.  My faith has grown stronger over these years, and also more distilled into basic ideas repeated through the scriptures. One idea is said in so many different ways by Jesus. This is the one way he said the idea making a great impression on me.  He said, “… whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”**

**Have I done everything I could for the least of those around me?  No, and probably all of you haven’t either. In our limited human capacity, we can be blinded to the needs of the least of those around us. As I was writing this sermon, a new idea came to me.  I always thought the least around us meant the poor, the disadvantaged.  Yet all sorts of people in all sorts of circumstances can have times in their lives when they feel like the least among us. It doesn’t matter how rich or poor any of us are if we have the misfortune of losing a loved one to this terrible and long-lasting pandemic.  The loss of a loved one in these abysmal circumstances makes all who have lost a loved one to the pandemic the least among us. No matter how much or how little money people have, the loss of a loved one, can make anyone feel like one of the least among us.**

**We never have any idea how another person is experiencing their life at any given time.  People can be depressed, lonely, or feeling worthless and lost.  We never know what strangers we meet, or even loved ones might be experiencing.  This is why I’ve said we don’t know how much a small, kind gesture can help another person. No matter our circumstances or our health problems, we each have the capacity to help one another. Just sometimes by the simplest act of kindness. The least among us can be anyone of us at various times in our lives.**

**What I know is Jesus came into this world to bring the gift of Gods’ great love and light unto the world.  He is the son of God, and God has other sons and daughters helping people to be able to touch the love of God. At the end of this Gospel reading is a reference to Light and dark.  I have experienced times of both light in my life and darkness creeping inside of me. I have learned whenever we need to rationalize anything, or want to question what is happening around us, in these times it’s good to reach out to the light Jesus and God so freely offer us. In times of our doubts and in times when we feel we are one of the least among us, we can ask Jesus to give us peace. What we know for sure is Jesus is the son of God, and for us who follow him, he is our Light of the World. Amen**