

Lent 2A, 2011

Text: John 3:1-17

Title: "Savior"

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Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.

Jesus, the author and perfecter of our Faith, the pioneer who leads the way, and then brings everything to perfection.

Jesus, the Son of God, who includes us in the true family picture.

Jesus, the bread of life, who feeds us by way of our ears.

Jesus, the Savior, who comes to rescue us.

We know John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Today, we focus on John 3:17, "For God did send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

Jesus is our Savior, and that's the picture we focus on today.

I was in eighth grade during the first Gulf War. It's the first war that I was old enough to remember.

I remember finding Iraq and Kuwait on a map.

I remember coming home from a Boy Scout meeting to see George Bush, Sr. on TV announcing air strikes.

What I probably remember most vividly are the Prisoners of War. I remember them showing the POWs on TV being interviewed by their captors. I remember the blank, lifeless expression on their faces. They weren't angry. They weren't sad or upset. But they just seemed empty, hollow, lifeless.

I remember trying to image what it would be like to be a prisoner of war. What would it be like to be captured by the enemy? What would it be like to be in prison? What would it be like to wait, not knowing if or when you would be released?

I'm sure that those prisoners hoped and prayed every day that they would be set free. They longed to come home to families, and to escape that nightmare. They yearned for someone to care enough about them to come to their rescue and to save them.

The word “Savior,” has, at its root, this picture of rescuing prisoners, especially prisoners of war who have been captured by an enemy. A Savior is one who comes to the rescue, who defeats the enemy, and who sets the captives free.

Jesus is a Savior. It’s right there in His Name. The name Jesus means, “The Lord saves.” It’s the name given Him by the angel from before His birth, “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

Jesus is a Savior. It’s the most common picture of Jesus in the New Testament. If you ask any Christian who Jesus is, they’ll most like say, “He my Savior.”

So what do you think about Jesus as your Savior. Do you really need to be saved? Do you need to be rescued?

We are taught from an early age that it’s good to be independent and to be able to take care of ourselves. We don’t like to be dependent, to be needy, to rely on other people’s help. It’s a sign of weakness.

Men, in particular, have issues with the concept of a “Savior.” They don’t want to see themselves as weak and helpless. They don’t want to acknowledge that they need to be rescued, that they need a Savior.

And plenty of women, too, don’t like to see themselves as some sort of damsel in distress, who needs a Savior to come to her rescue.

We all like to be strong and independent.

If you wonder why churches are so empty these days, and why particularly it’s the young and the strong who are absent, here’s a clue.

Many young people, in the prime of their life, don’t see themselves as needing to be saved or to be rescued. They’re either happy with their life, or have found other ways of dealing with their problems.

The truth is, all of us, young and old, men and women, need to be rescued. We need to be saved.

We are prisoners of war. We are being held captive by sin. That sin drains our lives away, just like those POWs. We are lifeless shells. We don’t enjoy the freedom that God has created us for.

We see the result of our captivity all around us. Broken relationships. Anger. Greed. Apathy. Violence. Pain. Sickness. Death.

We are held captive by these things and cannot free ourselves. We are in prison. There is no escape. There is no possibility of a jailbreak. We cannot free ourselves.

What is worse, some of us have started to identify with our captors and cooperate with them. We have developed a “Stockholm Syndrome” of sorts. We start to get used to our captivity and after awhile we don’t know any different. We are like children born into slavery, and slavery is the only life we know. We are accustomed to sin and all the evil that it brings. We can’t imagine life any other way.

So God the Father plans the greatest rescue mission ever.

The enemy is experienced and well-equipped. The enemy is strong and will not give up easily.

So God sends His best, His top officer, His Son to carry out the mission Himself.

It’s dangerous. It’s deadly. He knows that it will cost His Son His life. But He loves you. He created you, you belong to Him, and will not leave you to suffer in prison.

God’s Son willingly accepts this suicide mission. He knows the risks. He knows He must sacrifice His life to succeed. But He accepts His Father’s will, and carries out the mission. He stages the greatest jailbreak of all time. He gives up His life so that you can go free.

That’s what it means for Jesus to be your Savior. He came to find you and set you free, to give you your life back. To rescue you from everything that imprisons you, and steals your freedom.

You mean that much to Him. He’s willing to give up His life, so that you can go free.

He gives you new birth, a new, fresh, free start. That’s what Jesus promised Nicodemus, new birth through His Spirit, born not as a slave but as a free person, free from sin and death.

That’s what you have through your baptism. That is where Jesus rescued you from sin and eternal death.

No matter how many times you return to your life of sin, no matter how many times you continue to get captured, Jesus keeps coming back for you, rescuing you and setting you free.

Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, our Savior.