



FIRST  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
SPARTANBURG

*this way forward*

## WHY DID YOU DO IT?

John 3:16

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This morning's question came from a member as a heartfelt yearning to know: "Why did you do this for us? Why did you send Jesus? What did you see in us?"

The subtext of this question is both a feeling that we aren't worthy, but even more a realization that we know we are not worth it. We don't feel worthy because we haven't laid sufficient groundwork with our actions, with our thoughts, with our devotion, that might lead God to take such actions. But, even more, we know we're not worth it; that we are never ever going to make up for everything that God had to go through to bring us the gift of salvation. Jesus' R.O.I. (return on investment) for saving humanity will always be deep in the red.

So, the question "Why did you do this for us?" takes hold of two emotions within us, simultaneously. First, profound gratitude, gratitude that God was willing to do this for us even though, clearly, we don't deserve it. It's something like bringing a coupon to a restaurant for a buy-one-get-one-free entrée and, as you are handing it to the waiter, you realize it is expired. You don't deserve the discount, but you desperately want the discount, and the waiter gives it to you! You are filled with joy!

But, secondly, there is almost a sense of resentment within it. A sense that we are now going to have to try to live up to something that we're not ready to dive into.

This is like when you terribly fouled up your saxophone recital. Despite feeling embarrassed, you also felt a sigh of relief. You were sure your mother wouldn't make you take these lessons anymore and you were looking forward to the chance of spending more time playing soccer with your friends!

...But alas *my* mom (okay we are really talking about me here) graciously gave me one more chance – a chance that I really didn't want.

When God saved us, God also made it clear that we would have to work very hard to live into this new life we have been given.

Now that we understand this question contains divergent emotions within us, let's begin to answer it. In one sense, the answer to this question is easy. God did it because God loves us, because God is love. But, on the other hand, that answer doesn't get us anywhere, because it just takes us to the next question "Why in the world did you love us?"

There are plenty of verses in scripture that disclose our confusion and our unease with God's choice of us.

Peter said to Jesus (it's always Peter isn't it?),

*How often should I forgive...seven times?*

Sounds reasonable! Sounds generous! Sounds like a lot! How many people have you forgiven seven times?!

[But] Jesus said to him,

*'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. (Matthew 18:21b-22)*

Peter asks Jesus this question because he suspects that Jesus has an entirely different approach than anyone else he has ever met. Not only because we don't want to get burned, time and time again, from people taking advantage of us (which is certainly understandable) but because we have come to believe that sometimes tough love is necessary. Furthermore, Peter knows, because he knows it himself, that people don't want to be forgiven that many times because it just adds to the burden of guilt.

As difficult as endless forgiveness is for us to fathom, God's love goes another layer deeper into sacrificing for those who have been forgiven.

*Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5:7)*

We love things in appropriate measure. For our mother, our dear friend, our child, we would do most anything. But San Francisco Police Officer, Anna Cuthbertson, listened to a podcast (a podcast!) and decided to donate her kidney to a complete stranger, 65-year-old Joan Grealis. Officer Cuthbertson now has only one kidney. She has put her own life in jeopardy for someone who means nothing to her.

But Paul is not talking about strangers. Paul is telling us that Christ's sacrifice was for sinners, like donating both your kidneys to a serial arsonist. It simply does not make sense to make such a sacrifice for people like us.

But God's love goes even further.

*But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies,  
do good to those who hate you. (Matthew 5:44)*

Has anything more radical ever been said in the history of the world.

In the 1990s, Amy Biehl was a young American woman volunteering in South Africa as it emerged from the terror of Apartheid. Amy was brutally murdered when a mob ripped her from her car as she was driving a friend to the impoverished Gugulethu Township.

Amy's parents created a foundation to continue her work in Cape Town, giving opportunities to youth from troubled communities.

Their willingness to become involved in their daughter's place of murder was surprising in and of itself. But, their love went to the level that Jesus called for when Amy's parents endorsed her murderers' application for amnesty through South

Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Could you imagine signing such a piece of paper! And, yet, they took Jesus' words to love your enemies even one step further when they hired one of them to work at the foundation named in her memory. Could you imagine working side-by-side with your child's murder?...

Clearly, we don't always want this love from God because, in turn, we will expect to offer the same to others.

And, so, the more I consider this question “Why did you do this for us God?” The more...the more...the more...confused I am.

[illegible]

It is absolutely unbelievable.

We have to ask this question, “Why did you do this for us?” Because Jesus’ love is NOTHING like ours.

it truly has NO CONDITIONS.

it is ABSOLUTE AND TOTAL

it is a SHEER AND UTTER GIFT.

*Why did God do this for us. Why did God love us?*

Because divine love has no conditions. Which means God is going to love us no matter what we do, meaning we do not have to perform to a certain level. If we were a pet dog, God would continue to love us no matter how many times we soiled the divine carpet.

Furthermore, there are no conditions that require us to please God in order to continue to be loved. We could be the most wretched, mangy, ugly, boring, stupid dog ever to walk the face of the earth and God would continue to love us, to really love us.

That's what divine love is.

*Why did God do this for us? Why does God love us?*

Because divine love is complete, which means God loves every part of who we are. And God doesn't just love every part of who we are, but divine love loves us with the full power and passion of the Trinity. Even though we might be a dog, God loves us with the same passion, with the same level of engagement and commitment and power, as God loves one of the angels in heaven.

That's what divine love is.

*Why did God do this for us? Why does God love us?*

Because divine love is complete and an utter gift. You sometimes might hear that salvation is something like a door that needs to be opened. Hogwash! Unbiblical nonsense. God smashes through the door to get to us. We don't need faith in order to receive this gift. If we were that doggie in the window, waiting to be adopted by a passerby, it is not as if God is choosing that dog with the greatest puppy-dog eyes, that looks at us longingly, to please come and rescue me – No!

We could be that dog asleep, as he passed by. We could be the dog barking madly at everyone and everything around us. We could be the dog that

tries to bite His hand – and God would still rescue us.

Because that is what divine love is.

I don't get it.

Amen.