

¹ There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. ² He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered, "I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to see God's kingdom."

⁹ Nicodemus said, "How are these things possible?"

¹⁰ "Jesus answered, "You are a teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? ... ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you don't believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ... ¹⁶ God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. ¹⁷ GOD DIDN'T SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO JUDGE THE WORLD, BUT THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.

Last week Darick began by talking about Duke Basketball. OK, that didn't last any longer than WVU in the NCAA bracket. But, continuing the theme, let me move to the WVSSAC brackets. Who won the AAA boys championship last weekend?

Who?

Who is Hedgesville?

Besides being the WVSSAC AAA Boys Championship team? Do you know the last time Hedgesville played for the State Championship?

Yes. I do. I happen to know because I just happen to have the 57th Annual State Boys Basketball Championship Official Souvenir Program (cost 50 Cents). And let me show you what it said about Hedgesville when they last won the state championship. (Oh, yes Hedgesville was a SINGLE A High School back then.) Here's what it said about them in the program:

Class A, Region 2 – Hedgesville [page blank except "(Information Not Available from Hedgesville High School.)]

Ah, you may be impressed by a twice High School State Championship team flying this low below the radar.

OR, you may be impressed by the fact that I happen to have at my disposal for today's little sermon a copy of that historic Official Souvenir Program from **March 19, 20, 21, 1970**..

I have it because I [saved it](#), because it just happened to be the last time I attended said tournament, which was my senior year in high school, which was the last time my high school won the state championship. So that's why I have [saved it](#).

When I went to the attic to find it, I found some other stuff that I have [saved](#).

How about this – putting on the academic stole. This – this just happens to be the hood I received seven years after my high school won the state boys basketball championship, which said that I had completed the requirements for a *juris doctor* degree.

I think that this is the second time that I have ever worn it. But I [saved it](#), because it took a lot of grit for me to earn it.

Some of you have noticed that for the stewardship campaign this year at Saint Marks, we have featured individualized personal notecards being written and sent to **ALMOST** every member of the church. (Martha Hill still reminds me that she did not get one.) What a novel idea. That's not a pre-packaged stewardship campaign. "Where did that idea originate?" you ask.

Let me show you. [Here I "flip" campaign postcards about the room.] Back in the day when I was an elected official, this was my primary campaign tool – hundreds of individualized personal notecards being written and sent to as many voters in the county as possible. It actually worked. So we are trying it here for stewardship this year.

When I discovered

- ✦ the [basketball program](#) I had [saved](#), and
- ✦ the [academic hood](#) that I had [saved](#),
- ✦ I also discovered a [whole bunch of these postcards](#) I had [also saved](#).

But **despite these wonderful finds** in my attic, I **did not come across what I was originally looking for**. I am trying to get prepared for **West Virginia's sesquicentennial celebration** that is a mere **fourteen months and 29 days** away. What I was looking for is the **yellow plastic West Virginia dollar** I have [saved](#). They were minted during the centennial celebration and were, during 1963 only, legal tender

in the state of West Virginia. Yes, a yellow plastic dollar. I saved one of them then, because I knew that I would want to prominently display it for the sesquicentennial celebration. And you can't begin preparation for that even too soon, you know.

I know exactly where it is: it's in a plastic see through, sealed bag, in a green metal recipe box, in a small cardboard box, labeled: "MEMORY BOX."

When I was looking for it, I happened across **seven other cardboard boxes**, labeled: **"MEMORY BOX"** but not the right one.

In case you haven't caught on, I save a lot of memory stuff.

For many folks this is what it seems like the Church believes John 3:17 (God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him) **is all about: saving lots of THE WAY IT USED TO BE stuff.**

And, to be quite frank, it **makes those of us who enjoyed those memories before they became memories feel good**, and WE LIKE TO CLING TO THEM.

But it **doesn't so much excite** the **folks who didn't participate** in the **"back in the day"** with us.

But that's not the only definition of SAVED. You know that.

Sometimes we SAVE something in order to be able to use it for a good purpose. Take this WHITE HANDLED KNIFE. Jane Brown and I cut our wedding cake with it. And, it's not just a memory for us. It's something we can offer to our daughter in a few months with which to cut her wedding cake, and to honor the proverb, **"something old, something new, etc."** Yeah – saved in order to use it for a good purpose.

I've got a BANK, that says that, too: [pull out bank]: **I'm saving up for Jesus.** Well, kind of for Jesus. I'm saving up for my summer vacation, so I can be a better servant for Jesus.

Jesus is saving the world in order to use it for a good purpose.

OK, some of you think that there MIGHT BE YET ANOTHER OPTION for verse 17: **God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.**

You think that Jesus might be saving THE WORLD FROM THE JUDGMENT OF HELLFIRE AND DAMNATION.

Well, I certainly **can't argue with that.**

My only problem with the Church preaching so much about that is that it seems so often that when I hear it, it **seems like** even though Jesus said God sent His Son into the world to SAVE THE WORLD, there are a **lot of Christians** who really want **SOME** of them to NOT be saved.

Lynn pulled up a poster on Facebook the other day that kind of summed up that message in a way that reminds me of at least ***how some people hear the Church today:***

Jesus: OK, Here's an idea. You love them, like I loved you. Feed them, clothe them, and shelter them, and let me deal with judging them.

People: But what about people of a different religion or sexual orientation?

Jesus: Did I stutter?

OK, we're running out of time. So let me give just ONE MORE way we can interpret what Jesus meant when it says: **God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.**

And **this is why you pay \$8.00 for a lunch that costs \$7.85. It's for the higher level of education required – for the Greek translation.**

The word most often translated as "saved" or "salvation" in the Gospels is the greek word: SOZIEN.

And "saved" or "salvation" is a good translation, for sure. But an equally valid translation is HEAL, or depending on context, HEALED.

God sent Jesus into the world to **HEAL** the world.

Jesus did it all through His ministry. **Paul** over and over said that the **job** of those who claim Jesus' name: Christian – the **Body of Christ** – is to **RECONCILE**.

As we prepare for the high, holy season of the Christian year, I invite each of us

- ✦ to **not just** take a **trip down memory lane**,
- ✦ to **not just** **save up for the future**, and
- ✦ to **not just** **focus on the life which conquers death**, that we get through the resurrection.

But I urge you to spend some time in these few days remaining before Holy Week to do **personal examen** on **how your life** is **allowing Christ to work through you to bring healing and reconciliation into the world**.

Jesus gave up his glory in heaven, to become one of us, in order to provide healing and reconciliation. Here is **THE TEST** for **whether you have really received that healing and reconcing for yourself**. If Jesus has saved you (healed and reconciled), **then you are not able to do that which hurts nor divides**. Put another way: **IF YOUR LIFE IS CAUSING HURT AND DIVISION, THEN YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED JESUS' HEALING AND RECONCILIATION**. As Jesus liked to say, in different ways: **A good tree can't produce bad fruit. And a rotten tree can't produce good fruit**. (cf. Matthew 7:17-19.)

He even said you should not bring an offering into the church if you still have an unresolved grudge with someone. Leave your offering in the pew, get up, go and mend the relationship. Then come back and bring your gift to God. (Matthew 5:22-24.) (I know that's dangerous for me to say in the midst of a stewardship campaign, but it's **THAT IMPORTANT!**)

May this Lenten season of self-examination continue to bear good fruit of healing and reconciliation. May you **prune away all that hurts and divides**. May you experience salvation and give it as well.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.