



**SAINT JAMES'**  
**EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
 Fremont, California

**SERMON**

22. March, 2009. Lent 4

Title: "Should Not Perish, But Have Everlasting Life"

Text: St. Mark 8:31-38

J.J.

Today's Gospel is familiar to most of us: Nicodemus coming to Jesus in the middle of the night. And, then, there's that one verse in this story that is so very familiar . . . for many of us, it may have been the first Scripture passage that we ever committed to memory. Let me put that to the test (and I will cheat a bit, by starting it off in the King's English—the KJV—and you say it with me as you are able. . . OK): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" . . . see? We do know it. The challenge, however, in knowing something so well, is that we can easily take it for granted, and fail to discern its deeper meaning for us today. I grew up thinking that this story was about the importance of "believing" so that I could get to heaven—so that we could have everlasting life in the sweet by and by. And, often this passage was used as a club: Believe . . . or else! And, whereas, indeed this story does talk about the importance of believing and having everlasting life, that is not the only way to look at it, and that is especially true for us in the Episcopal tradition. For us, the focus of Scripture is not on the "sweet by and by," but on the here and now—I cannot emphasize that point enough—our focus is always on what God is doing among us now. So . . . what does this story, and in particular this passage that we know so well . . . what is this story and this passage saying to us about what God is saying and doing among us, now?

A week ago, last Thursday, Kathy and I were invited by some of you to attend the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Breakfast for the Tri-City Homeless Coalition, now known as "Abode Services." At first I thought, we don't need this during Lent. Our schedules are full enough. And besides, it was going to be at 7:30 in the morning, after a long meeting with Michael Barlowe and our Transition Team just the night before. But I got there! And on time! (well almost). Quickly, I was directed to our tables, where some 26 of our members were seated. And, no sooner did I sit down . . . breakfast was served . . . the lights went out . . . the huge screen in front of us suddenly lit up . . . and guess who should appear before us . . . Look at this:

**[SHOW Abode Services DVD: "Journey Home"]**

I don't know about you, but I want to say, I was impressed. What impressed me even more was to learn that this Parish, St. James', was part of a coalition of churches, who started the Tri-City Homeless Coalition, or "Abode Services," some twenty years ago. You, as the people of God in this place, would not simply stand by as growing numbers of homeless adults and children in our area went without shelter, or were hungry. Anyone here this morning who was part of that movement 20 years ago? Please stand up. And, who of you are currently involved with providing shelter, monitoring the use of our space when we provide shelter, or preparing food for the coalition? Please stand. Over these twenty years, "Abode Services," has provided:

- Shelter, housing and support services to 8,472 homeless people, of which 2,829 were children.
- 1,455,000 meals
- A half million volunteer hours by over 4,000 Volunteers from over 250 groups in the Tri-City area.
- And most importantly, the "re-housing" of 5,165 individuals who were once homeless.

I want to tell you, I'm proud of you and proud to be connected with this Parish—to St. James'. I tell you, I believe that this is exactly what Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel reading: Indeed, God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that believing in him, people would not perish, but have life. You, here at St. James', you understand that, and you have put your faith into practice in a wonderful and creative way, for some twenty years now, not only with Abode Services, but Hillside Care Center, and The Socks Project, and in many other social service ministries so that people, especially the homeless and the hungry, so that people, might not perish, but have life, here and now . . . and, yes . . . everlasting life, too. Amen

SDG

The Rev. Dr. David E. Abernethy-Deppe  
 Castro Valley, California