



Eden Mills Presbyterian Church
Second Sunday in Lent – March 1st, 2026

Every so often, my father and I used to get talking about things like heaven – like who’s going to make it into heaven and who isn’t likely to. Invariably, he used to ask me if I might have any inside information – some influence or pull. Ultimately, he would wonder, half jokingly, what his chances of making it might be.

Even though I would tell him that his chances were very, very good, he seemed just a little skeptical – like maybe a daughter is without credibility in her own family??

What are the chances? Why do I say with such assurance and confidence that they are very, very good? I know how beloved the verse John 3:16 is – we often see it help up on posters by fans at sporting events. But I wonder how many people actually read, take into their hearts John 3:17, “For God did not send his Son into the world to be its judge, but to be its saviour. That the **world** through him might be saved.”

You see, our chances of salvation are wholly dependent on the nature of God – God’s will and longing for the world. As the psalmist says to God in Ps. 130:3, “If you kept a record of our sins, who could escape being condemned?” The psalmist continues with a simple and saddened answer — “no one.” Then he goes on, “but you do forgive us, so that we should stand in awe of you.” [Psalm 130:4]

What are the chances? Let’s look at the beginning of the story. Genesis tells us that God created the world and set it in motion. Everything that is, including us, God created. And as God looked at each thing, lingered over each piece of creation, he declared his pleasure in every part, asserting its very goodness. Of us, God said that it was very, very good.

Then, having placed us in the midst of all of his creation, God told us to enjoy the beauty and bounty of his awesome garden, all of it, except for one part. That we were not to touch. But, it was like waving a red flag in front of a bull. All we wanted, all we could think about was that one part. No matter the abundance and lushness of all that was available to us, that one prohibition filled our minds and haunted our days. The “apple” was scarcely consumed when we realized that we were wrong, that we were about to get found out. So, we hid – from God. We hid from the one who created us, lovingly, tenderly, in his own image and likeness.

And that is just the beginning. There is jealousy of one brother over another, jealousy so vehement that one kills the other. Things degenerate to the point that God decides to try again. Protecting one family [Noah’s] and a pair of every creature, God allows the waters to wash over the land, attempting to cleanse creation of its wilfulness. Still, the human capacity for pride-filled behaviour survives and there comes a time when we would build a tower, with the overthrow of heaven as our goal.

A god, after our image and likeness would have decided that we were hopeless, decided to call it quits, that it was the height of foolishness to show mercy and kindness to those who wouldn’t recognize mercy and kindness if they were shown a picture. A god, after our image and likeness would have scrapped the whole “creation” thing as a very bad idea.

Yet, our God doesn’t seem to know when to quit, to give up and walk away. Our God is relentless, persistent in the attempt to have a relationship with his created, to redeem the humanity God created.

Today, we have the story of Abram – better known to us as Abraham. God chooses

him, and it's a rather interesting choice.

Abram is already 75 years old, and he and his aged wife Sarai are childless. Centuries later, Paul would describe him as "a man as good as dead" [Romans 4:19] What was God thinking? Does God want to save humanity or not? What are the chances that Abram will pick up and leave what he knows for that which he doesn't know, on the strength of God's promise, God's blessing, God's word that he will be the ancestor of a great nation? Against all odds, Abram trusts God and embarks on a journey, destination unknown.

The stories of the lives of the human family continue – stumbling from faithfulness to faithlessness, from willing obedience to disobedience. And the story of God's relentless attempts to re-establish relationship with humanity keep pace, with God trying every plan, every possible scheme to reach out and restore relationship with us.

Finally, God sends the Word through which God has created us and all things, from the beginning. God sends the Word of his love, clothed in human flesh so that the Word would be recognizable, so that the Word could be heard and seen, felt and touched by the one with whom God has longed to have communion.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believed in him would not perish but have everlasting life." [John 3:16]

One night, Nicodemus came to Jesus with a question, a question as old as time and as new as my long ago conversations with my Dad. Jesus has just finished telling Nicodemus that "no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again." [John 3:3b]. And Nicodemus asks, "How can a grown man be born again? ... He certainly cannot enter his mother's womb and be born a second time." [John 3:4] What are the chances of anyone seeing the Kingdom of God?

John Mathis says it this way: "Simply put, God loves us. God loves us beyond all human circumstances. Many are unable to accept the fact that God's grace is freely given. Immanuel, God with us, came into the world to show us the way so that we 'might be saved through him' [John 3:17]. Jesus came to save. Jesus came to lift us up."

We spend too much time and energy judging ourselves and others. We spend too much time and energy trying to second guess God, trying to estimate just how much we need to obey God and how much we can get away with before God washes God's hands of us. John's gospel tells us that God loves us so much that he will stop at nothing, not even his Son's life, to reach out to us. John's gospel tells us that Jesus came to save the world, not to judge it.

From our creation, God has loved us with an unconditional, unrelenting, never-give-up love – a love beyond our understanding or imagining. It's a gift that waits for us to reach out for it, to embrace it, to accept it. As we do, when we open this gift, our lives are renewed, begun anew – or as Jesus said to Nicodemus, we are born again. You see, while it is important to wonder about our chances of being saved, it is God's intention, God's longing that we know salvation now, not just on our last day on earth. God's love for us and for his creation, when accepted into our hearts, can make our lives brand new, can make all the difference in the world – beginning now and stretching into eternity.

What are our chances? Perhaps a more relevant and immediate question is "what are we waiting for?" God is calling us to leave our old ways of thinking, judging and living – to strike out into a new life, trusting him to lead us, to love us, to save us. Why would we live without knowing, relying on his love? How can we let others live without knowing that love for themselves? What are we waiting for?