

Second Sunday of Lent
March 1, 2026
John 3:1–17

John 3:16 may be Christianity's elevator pitch, but I have always been more drawn to the verses around it, where Jesus describes salvation in a way that is layered, mysterious, and more than a little confusing.

Salvation, Jesus says, is like being born. Not a quick transaction or a single decision, but a long process of becoming: gradual, uncomfortable, sometimes painful, and often complicated. But it is the only way to life.

Salvation is what happens when God makes room to breathe inside the tight places that are killing us. Jesus suggests that we undergo two births in our lifetime. We are born of the flesh, and we are born from above, of the Spirit. We know how physical birth transpires, but this second birth is mysterious. Salvation is not a formulaic prayer or a ticket to paradise. It is the ongoing work of God that keeps us alive each and every day.

Barbara Brown Taylor reflects on this in her memoir [Leaving Church](#). She recalls being asked, "Tell us what is saving your life now." She writes that it was such a good question she has kept asking it ever since.

What is saving your life now?

I have borrowed that question often. But when I invite people to consider salvation, I usually begin one step earlier:

What is killing you now?

Because, in my experience, naming what is killing me often leads to recognizing what is saving me.

So, what is killing you today? What feels insufferable? What burden is too heavy? What pain refuses to be quiet?

Is it physical pain, a body that feels like it has turned against you? Is it anxiety that shrinks your world and keeps you from reaching toward friendships, opportunities, or hope? Is it relentless worry over someone you love? Grief that lingers? Bills you cannot pay? Loneliness that hums beneath everything you do? The violence of our world? A creeping sense of meaninglessness?

To be human is to know suffering, loss, and many small deaths along the way. But the good news is that salvation is here. It is in the air we breathe and the wind that moves around us. It surrounds us each day, offering life in the midst of all that threatens us.

Taylor writes:

“Salvation is so much more than many of its proponents would have us believe. In the Bible, human beings experience God’s salvation when peace ends war, when food follows famine, when health supplants sickness and freedom trumps oppression. Salvation is a word for the divine spaciousness that comes to human beings in all the tight places where their lives are at risk.”

What is saving you today?

Salvation is what happens when God makes room to breathe inside the tight places that are killing us. So what is saving your life today?

The space doesn’t have to be huge — here are a few from my list.

When our chocolate lab finds the largest stick in the yard (more like a small tree) and parades it around the neighborhood looking for someone to congratulate her on her find — that joy saves me.

When our son came home recently and he’s become the kind of man who quietly puts his dirty dishes in the dishwasher, that small gesture saves me.

When I take time to savor salted caramel ice cream, lose myself in a great novel, laugh so hard I cry, or cry so hard that it washes a tight, heavy pain right out of me — that saves me too.

What is saving you today?

The good news of the gospel is not that Christians avoid pain and suffering. It is that pain and suffering do not get the final word.

Don't overthink it. It doesn't have to be impressive. Just name it.

The good news of the gospel is not that Christians avoid pain and suffering. It is that pain and suffering do not get the final word.

On this second Sunday of Lent, we remember that our salvation story leads us to the cross, to betrayal, grief, and death. But it does not end there. It leads us to a morning when a stone is rolled away and death is told, gently but firmly, that it is not in charge.

Resurrection is not a shortcut around pain. It is God's declaration that pain will not own us forever.

Salvation is not only what happens after death. Salvation keeps us alive. It is the steady, mysterious work of the Spirit birthing new life in us, again and again.

Questions for reflection on John 3:1–17

1. What feels like it is “killing” you right now, physically, emotionally, or spiritually?

2. What small, ordinary thing is saving your life today?
3. How might you pay closer attention to the quiet, daily work of salvation unfolding around you?