



Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 14, 2021

Introduction

The fourth of the Old Testament promises providing a baptismal lens this Lent is the promise God makes to Moses: those who look on the bronze serpent will live. In today's gospel Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live. When we receive the sign of the cross in baptism, that cross becomes the sign we can look to in faith for healing, for restored relationship to God, for hope when we are dying.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, Father, ✙ Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, the keeper of the covenant, the source of steadfast love, our rock and our redeemer. **Amen.**

God hears us when we cry, and draws us close in Jesus Christ. Let us return to the one who is full of compassion.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Fountain of living water, **pour out your mercy over us.**
Our sin is heavy, and we long to be free.
Rebuild what we have ruined and mend what we have torn.
Wash us in your cleansing flood.
Make us alive in the Spirit to follow in the way of Jesus,
as healers and restorers of the world you so love. Amen.

Beloved, God's word never fails.
The promise rests on grace: by the saving love of Jesus Christ, the wisdom and power of God, your sins are ✙ forgiven, and God remembers them no more.
Journey in the way of Jesus. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn ELW # 848/LBW #520 Give to Our God Immortal Praise!

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God, rich in mercy, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Numbers 21:4-9

Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.

Read the text [here](#).

Psalmody: Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good,
for God's mercy endures forever.

²**Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim
that God redeemed them from the hand of the foe,**

³gathering them in from the lands;
from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

¹⁷**Some were fools and took rebellious paths;
through their sins they were afflicted.**

¹⁸They loathed all manner of food
and drew near to death's door.

¹⁹**Then in their trouble they cried to the LORD
and you delivered them from their distress.**

²⁰You sent forth your word and healed them
and rescued them from the grave.

²¹**Let them give thanks to you, LORD, for your steadfast love
and your wonderful works for all people.**

²²Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving
and tell of your deeds with shouts of joy.

Gospel: John 3:14-21

To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader, Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today's first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

Our Gospel text today begins in the middle of a story. It is a story we all should know, and you might want to refresh your memory by reading from the beginning of this third chapter of the Gospel of John.

A Pharisee named Nicodemus comes to see Jesus after Jesus has overturned the tables in the temple and then done several miracles. Nicodemus is convinced that Jesus has been sent by God as he says to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

This whole conversation with Nicodemus, then, is Jesus expanding what Nicodemus has already begun to figure out. Our text today only covers the response from Jesus after Nicodemus asks the question, “How can this be?”

Jesus, in full teaching mode, answers the question about who he is and about what he has come to share. Jesus says to Nicodemus, “If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?”

The truth about this conversation is that it is true about every one of us. How can we believe something that is too good to be true? If Jesus came to be lifted up so that we might live, why do we not believe? Why is it so hard for us?

Over the past year, we have seen over and over again how we can fall into traps of believing things that are not true, just because we want them to be true, and not believing things that are proved to be true. We want things to be within our control.

We want to have a say in things that are done, about how we live, whether or not we wear a mask, whether or not we get a shot, whether or not we believe the truth. Just as we have seen the evidence that masks work, that getting vaccines work, Jesus has already provided evidence to Nicodemus that he is from God by the miracles he has done. It is time to believe the truth.

The truth is that Jesus came so that we might believe. Jesus was lifted up on the cross and died so that we might live. We are sent to tell this story to others so that they might believe, and live. As the author of the Gospel of John tells us, this Gospel exists for one reason and one reason only – so that all who read it and hear it might believe.

So, you might wonder, what is so important about believing? Because believing this truth is life-changing, and lifesaving. Jesus statement in verses 16 and 17 should change the life of everyone who hears it – For God so loved the world, the cosmos, everything that was created by God – God loved it so much that he sent his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. For God did not send his son to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.

Those are life-changing words! God has only ever intended good for us, and to make sure that we knew that Jesus was sent to remind us of God’s eternal love and grace upon grace.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 666 / LBW # 385

What Wondrous Love Is This

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles’ Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

You sent your Son that the world might be saved through him. Inspire the witness of the church throughout the world. Empower missionaries, Bible translators, and ministries of service in your name. Bless our partners in ministry, our ELCA global partner churches, and Young Adults in Global Mission. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

From east to west your steadfast love is shown. Nourish seas and deserts, wilderness areas and cities. Give water to thirsty lands; nurture spring growth that feeds hungry creatures; bless farmers as they prepare for the growing season. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You sustained your people in the wilderness. Give courage to all who lead in times of crisis and scarce resources. Prosper the work of those who aid victims of famine and drought. Bring peace in places where scarce resources cause violence. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Your mercy endures forever. Deliver all who cry to you, especially those who are hungry or without homes. Give life in places where death seems triumphant; give healing to those who are sick and comfort to those who mourn, especially those we name now. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

By grace we have been saved. Fill this congregation to overflowing with that grace, that we show mercy to others. Nourish any in our midst who are hungry, especially children, and bless our ministries of feeding and shelter. Give us patience and courage when the way seems long. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Your Son was lifted up that whoever believes might have eternal life. We praise you for all who have died in Christ. Bring us with all the saints into the fullness of your promises. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;**

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 779 / WOV # 448

Amazing Grace

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ray Sipe.