

4th Sunday Lent B 18

March 11, 2018

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In our Gospel reading for today we hear what might be the most known verse in the Bible, John 3:16 *'For God so loved the world that that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.'* Yet this verse is I believe has a deeper meaning especially when it is viewed in the context of the larger story in which it is contained.

At the start of chapter 3 Jesus is visited by a Pharisee named Nicodemus. He is a teacher of the law who comes to Jesus by night so as not to be seen by his peers or the world. Nicodemus comes to Jesus asking if Jesus is who he thinks Jesus might be. He begins by saying to Jesus; *'We know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do that signs you do apart from God.'* Jesus responds with; *'very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.'* Which leads to going back and forth about what it means to be born from above until Nicodemus asks 'How can this be?'

In response Jesus makes a direct comparison for Nicodemus to make his point from the very scriptures Nicodemus should be an expert in. *'just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him might have eternal life.'*

Jesus uses this event from the book of Numbers, a book we don't often read because it is mostly as its title say it is a book of numbers. It begins and ends with a census as the people left on their wilderness journey and ends with a census as they are about to enter into the Promised Land. Yet enter mixed with all the counting of the people are stories about the people of Israel as they wondered in the wilderness. Like the one we heard in our first reading for today. The people of Israel who have been wondering for months, they

March 11, 2018

are dissatisfied with their situation and with Moses and ultimately with God. They complain how they were forced to leave the comforts of their homes in Egypt to live in tents in the wilderness. They whine and complain and whine and complain.

They complain; 'You, that is Moses and God, you have taken us away from our homes in Egypt to make us wonder in circles in the dessert. We no longer have a roof over our heads, each day we must take down our tents move them a few miles and put them back up again. Instead of going to the well each day for water we must search for water in creeks and pools. We no longer have our cupboards full of food instead we have to hunt and gather for things to eat. We hate this food; we hate this miserable and detestable food.'

Have you ever heard any whining like that? They sound like a bunch of children complaining against the actions of their parents. I remember times when my brothers and sisters would go in telling our mother how hungry we were. Then asking mom what was for supper that night. Only to get some answer that we did not want to hear, not that she would make us eat bad food, it was just not what we wanted to eat. Mostly because it was those were ingredients which were left in her cupboard that day. We would complain and whine asking for something better, something different. Even now I can still hear her saying, 'I guess you are not as hungry as you say you are.' That did not stop our complaining and it did not stop the people of Israel from complaining either.

So God, tired of hearing the complaining from his children, sent poisonous serpents into the camps where many people were bitten and many died. This woke them up and exposed their bad behavior, their complaining against Moses and God. They stopped their complaining as they begged for forgiveness. They asked not only for forgiveness but to have God take away

March 11, 2018

the serpents which plagued them. But God did not take away the threat of death rather he did give them an opportunity to live.

God instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it high over the camp so that all might see it. Then if one of them was bitten, they could look upon the serpent and live. God desired the people to have faith in him, faith in their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of slavery and was bringing them to the Promised Land. Here God did not just fix the problem nor did he just heal everyone, but did God did give all of them a way to live. God told them; 'Look upon this very thing that is causing you pain and certain death, then you will receive life.'

It is this comparison Jesus makes for Nicodemus. *'as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him might have eternal life.'* Jesus speaks of his suffering and death, foreshadowing his own being raised up on the cross, which was to come in order that the world might be saved. Then we get this famous verse which tells us why the Son of Man must be lifted up. *'For God so loves the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.'*

One thing about this verse we often fail to understand is what the writer means by world. When we hear the word, 'world' we often think of this planet called earth, spinning and orbiting the sun. For the writer of the gospel the 'world' meant all the forces of nature and culture which actively worked against God. To say that God so loved the world was to say God so loved his enemies that God sent his Son in order that the world, that God's enemies who are suffering and headed towards death, might have eternal life.

March 11, 2018

This teaching concludes with verse 17 as Jesus speaks directly why he came.

‘God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.’ God sent the Jesus, God’s Son into the world not for vengeance or out of anger but out of love in order that the world might receive the gift of eternal life.

This is where I think Paul in writing to the Ephesians drives home the point even further. *‘You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of great love with which God loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved. With Christ God raised us up and enthroned us in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.’*

Jesus the Son of Man came out the love God has for us, his children. Even though we are also children of the world and often are found whining and complaining and sinning against God. God became incarnate in Jesus for our sake, even when we did not deserve it. Jesus, Son of Man was lifted up on the cross and died for our sins so that we might be reconciled to God and each other, that we might be raised up to new life in Christ Jesus.

The bronze serpent, a symbol of the instrument of suffering and death became for the people of Israel a means to be cured and to live. The cross, meant to be a sign of suffering and death, a way of punishment in the world. Yet when Jesus was lifted up became a way to eternal life and a gift of salvation to those who are perishing. The cross has become for us a reminder of the love our God has for us his children. *‘For God so loved the world that that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.’* AMEN T.G.B.T.G. *Pastor Michael*

John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.’