

John 3:14-21

As the snake was lifted up on a pole in the desert, so Christ is to be lifted up so that all who seek to be saved may look to him. God sent him into the world to save, not condemn, but those who love darkness rather than light are already condemned, because they want to keep their actions hidden and not have them exposed.

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.”

Human life in the world was to see love in its fullest expression flowing from God, the source of life and love. We saw it in Jesus Christ. Everyone who came under his influence knew they were in touch with life at its best, and could leave their negative and destructive ways. He did not come in judgement but in the fullest acceptance and authenticity. A light had come into the world. Many seemed to prefer their darkness to this light, and sought ways to keep their actions of darkness from being exposed to the light. But those who want to live a more authentic life are always searching for that light which comes from a source of all goodness beyond us.

(Frances Macnab, A fine wind is blowing, P.66)

Readings COCU 22B.Lent 4B

On the borders of the Promised Land a generation who had never lived in Egypt (or, at least were too young to remember living there if they had) complained about the hardship of the wilderness and longed to “return” to Egypt. Hundreds of years later, Jesus uses the story of the plague of snakes that attacked these rebellious Israelites, and the bronze snake that God instructed Moses to erect for their healing, to describe the healing work he had come to do. A key to both stories is the willingness to admit what plagues us. To find healing the Israelites had to “look up” to the bronze snake. This was an act of repentance, turning their eyes from the fiery snakes, to the God who had cared for them for decades and now offered them healing. Those who love darkness, says Jesus, will not look up to him when he is lifted up, because to do so would take repentance and an admission of their need. Those who are unashamed and willing to come to the light will look up and find life. In the same way the Psalmist tells that those who rebelled but then repented (the song seems to reference the Old Testament story) found healing and were forgiven and saved. Finally, in Ephesians we are reminded that it is God’s grace in Christ that saves us, which we appropriate simply by faith – which means that we recognise our need, and turn to God to meet it. The invitation of this week’s Lectionary, then, is that God graciously and freely saves us, but, to live as “saved” people, we need to recognise our need, repent and look up to Jesus. The result of this, as Ephesians tells us, is a life of good works. We are saved by grace, changed by repentance and called to a life of meaning and abundance in the good works God has prepared for us. All of this means we face a decision today: Where do we need to repent, and how can this change our lives so that we become followers of Christ who bring grace to others through our good works? *(Source: John van de Laar, Sacredise)*

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

A song of praise for God who punished those who, in their foolishness disobeyed and rebelled, but who forgave and saved them when they called out to God.

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;

for God's steadfast love endures forever.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
those redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.
Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their
iniquities endured affliction; they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and saved them from their distress;
the Lord sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.

Let them thank the Lord for God's steadfast love,

for God's wonderful works to humankind.

**And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of God's deeds with songs of joy.**

Numbers 21:4-9

The people of Israel complain about being in the desert because there is no food or water and they don't like the food God has provided. When a plague of snakes attacks them, they ask for forgiveness and salvation. God instructs Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole so that anyone bitten by a snake can look at the bronze snake and be healed.

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Then the

Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Ephesians 2:1-10

Paul writes that though we once followed the ways of the world and were dead in our sins, deserving judgement like anyone else, God saved us through Christ, as an act of grace that we did not earn. But God has created us to do good works in Christ.

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.