

**Worship Service for March 14<sup>th</sup>: 4th Sunday in Lent**

- **Old Testament:** Numbers 21:4-9
- **New Testament:** John 3:14-21
- **Psalms:** Psalm 107:1-3

**Announcements:**

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- Bible study will resume on March 17<sup>th</sup>. Time: 7pm; Place: St. David's. We will be studying James 1.

**Sermon: Everyone Who Believes In Jesus Will Have Eternal Life!**

The Israelites were a people chosen by God and after four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, God delivered them through Moses. Moses led them through the wilderness to the land of milk and honey that God had promised them. The Israelites were not the easiest people to lead, and the Bible described them as "stiff-necked".

In our passage today we encounter them on their way to the promised land. At this stage they are tired of how long the journey is taking. This journey took altogether forty years before they finally get to the promised land. Of course, traveling on foot to an unknown land through a wilderness is tedious. They face all kinds of dangers – neighboring nations that feel threatened by their numbers or that look at them as prey and all kinds of dangerous animals and fiery snakes that are quite poisonous.

Out of their impatience they become angry and complain against Moses and God. They are attacked by poisonous snakes and they come to Moses in repentance, acknowledging that they have sinned against God. Moses is advised by God to make a replica of a poisonous snake out of bronze and anyone who looks at it will be healed from the snake bite.

The symbol of the snake has been used by different cultures in different ways. Most cultures using it as a symbol of power and protection. In Egypt, their Pharaohs would have a cobra on their crowns as a symbol of protection from their enemies. In ancient times, people discovered that the snake's venom was a source of medicine that could be used to heal a snake bite.



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This led to the invention of the symbol of the *caduceus* which is used by the medical field.

Some cultures see the serpent as a positive and powerful, though dangerous reptile. Others, including Jews and Christians, see the serpent as a strong negative force symbolizing the origin of evil in the world and in us.

The bronze serpent was stored in the Tabernacle as sacred, and many Israelites secretly worshipped it. This lasted for years until the reign of King Hezekiah who broke the bronze snake to pieces. He emphasized to the people that it wasn't the bronze serpent that had healed them but the saving power of God.

Our New Testament passage references this passage in a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus a religious leader. Jesus mentions to Nicodemus that one has to become born again in order to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus wonders how that can be possible for a grown person. And Jesus explains that it happens through the water and the spirit.

There are many people today who are like Nicodemus and yes, some of them are in the church and have been Christians for years. Like the religious leader, they too don't know what it means to be born again, to be a Christian. It is nothing to be ashamed of, but it is something to research about.

Jesus informs us this morning that it was made possible because God loved the world so much so that He sent His one and only Son Jesus that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

How did that happen? Jesus says in the same way that Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, so was Jesus lifted up so that everyone who believes will be saved and have eternal life.

You who is listening to this message this morning, do you truly believe? Or is your believe selective? There are some people who believe in Jesus Christ yet say they don't believe in the resurrection. We have to make sure that in believing we believe completely and not partially. We can't pick and choose what to believe.

Christianity is a religion of faith and believe. None of us present here was present when Jesus was crucified. And that is fine, because John tells us in his gospel that that was the purpose why he wrote the gospel of John *"But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name."* (John 20:31).

It is therefore okay if you are feeling like Nicodemus, but it is not okay if you stay that way. Jesus explains to us the love of God the Father. He says God did not send His Son to judge the world but to save the world through him. If He wanted to, then we would have continued to experience His judgment like in the days of the Old Testament where people were immediately punished for their wrongs. God provided a better way for us through Christ that we can now come and confess our sins and be saved.

God sent His Son to introduce us to a new kingdom which is different from the one we are experiencing on earth. A kingdom which is different from the one of pain, hatred, injustice, violence, oppression that we experience. The kingdom Jesus introduces to us is one of mercy, forgiveness, grace, freedom and unconditional love, a kingdom free of violence, hatred, injustice, oppression and pain.

When Jesus died, he canceled every judgment that was set against us with their punishment and nailed them to the cross. This means that we can now look at those things that are harmful in our lives; those things that obstruct us from serving God in spirit and in truth, list them honestly and invite Jesus into our lives to bring the healing and deliverance we need from those things.

The cross helps us to admit our weaknesses – our refusal to love, our indifference to injustice and suffering, our desire for violence and resistance to change, our hatred of difference and love for judgment and harmful criticism. It creates in us the desire to know and do better and to be like our Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ.

But in order for us to achieve that, we have to believe. Whosoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. Believing in Jesus means coming out of

darkness and into the marvelous light that he is offering. It is coming into the light of this new kingdom that is devoid of evil and full of good. Believing is accepting the finished work of Christ on the cross, his suffering, death and resurrection. It is accepting that our Christian life is a journey and a process and sometimes the process will be painful, but it will end in glory. In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Prayers**

Generous and gracious God, with your great mercy, you have made us alive together with Christ. By your grace we are saved from sin and despair and promised hope for everlasting life with you. You have shown us immeasurable riches through your grace and mercy, and we offer you our deepest gratitude, now and always. We pray that each person will know the fullness of your gifts in ways that touch their deepest needs.

We pray for those dear to us and all those we've come to lean on in the months of the pandemic... We pray for those who are struggling in isolation or frustration, for all those who experience illness or pain in body, mind or spirit, for all who have lost someone or something central to their lives and have to cope with grief and loss. May all these, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We pray for peace and safety in the world, for countries struggling to care for their citizens and to rebuild their economies, for all who do not receive the respect and consideration they deserve, for all those persecuted for their faith or their views, for all who are disenfranchised and long to live in freedom. May all these, your children, know your grace and mercy.

We pray for your church around the world and for the congregations we know, for the work of presbyteries across Canada and the faithful ministries they lead in this time of working at a distance, for the learning we have gained in outreach during the pandemic and all who have connected to your church in new ways, and for ministers and other leaders who are finding this time of planning and decision making very stressful. May your church in all its many expressions know your grace and mercy.

We pray for the concerns on our hearts this day, for the fears and frustrations we struggle with, for any troubled relationships, for the doubts and the hopes which compete within us, for any need of healing and support. May we, your children, know your grace and mercy.

Lord Jesus, you gave so much without counting the cost. Bless these gifts with your generous love. Send them and us into the world to bless it with the same hope and healing we have found in you. And let us not count the cost until we too have given all we can.

We offer the prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray, saying: *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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Benediction**

May the grace and joyous favor of the Lord Jesus Christ, the unconditional love of God, and the precious fellowship that we share in the Holy Spirit be yours continually. Amen!