

March 10, 2024

Fourth Sunday of Lent

John 3:14-21

The reading this morning is part of the longer conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus. The one about being born again. It is filled with interesting imagery from the Old Testament but it has a slight twist.

This passage also talks about God's love for us and more importantly, how God expresses that love to us.

The imagery from the Old Testament comes from Numbers 21-9. This is part of the story of the Jews and Moses in the desert. Where the Jews were being bitten by snakes and were dying. They believed that this was happening to them because of their sins. So the Jews asked Moses to talk with God and ask for help. God instructed Moses to

make a staff with bronze serpents on it. When Moses lifted up the staff those who saw it were healed of their snake bites. Jesus is expanding this story and giving it a new meaning. One that will be important at His crucifixion, but more importantly after His resurrection.

Like the staff of Moses, Jesus too will be lifted up. He will be lifted up on the cross on Golgotha. Jesus being lifted up will heal people also. His healing will continue for millennia to come. This is a very different kind of healing from Moses. Those who see Jesus lifted up and believe in Him will be cured. Those who believe years later will also be cured. They will be cured of that serpent of sins bite. Jesus on the cross will heal humanity of its sin. Jesus's death on the cross will go much farther than healing sin. Jesus's death on the cross will destroy death completely. This will far exceed our hopes and expectations. Jesus is kind of comparing Himself to Moses and his staff, but He is far beyond what Moses could only hope to do. Jesus needed a starting reference to help Nicodemus understand His teachings. This was a good one.

In the past weeks we have seen the term lifted up used to reference resurrection. We talked about Peter's mother in-law and Jairus's daughter as being lifted up. In our gospel this morning there is no direct understanding that lifted up means resurrection. Here it only references Jesus's encounter with the cross and how that event will have a healing effect on humanity. Yet the resurrection is there, it is just not actually stated. You cannot have the resurrection without the cross. We know this now as a post resurrection people, but Nicodemus would not have a hot clue.

This passage expresses the kind of love God has for us. There is no limits on His love or what He is willing to sacrifice for us. God sends His only Son to save us from our sins. That whoever comes to believe in the Son will have everlasting life. God sent His Son not to condemn our world but to save us. There are strong warnings for those who do not believe. This is where we need to remember the context of why this was said. It was recorded this way to strengthen and encourage those

Christians who were expelled from their synagogues for following Jesus. John is encouraging them for sticking with their new faith. These passages have been misunderstood for years and used to persecute non-Christians in the past. That was not the original intention of this passage.

For us today it is all about God's love for us. To remind us that Jesus being lifted up on the cross would lead to His resurrection and the end of sin and death. Jesus's resurrection made humanity realize that we are all God's children and heirs to eternal life. We need to continually remember how much God loves us and what He is willing to do for our good and salvation. Always remember His love. Pastor D