**3/10/24**

**Snakes, Time, & John 3:16**

**John 3:14-21**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2, NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good morning, everyone! Thank you for flying in on your umbrellas, I mean thank you for rowing your boats through the wind and rain in order to get here to church this morning. Now, for those of you on the conference call, I applaud you, as you are the smart ones indeed. I am sure that you are all snuggled up in your blankets at home. You did not deal with that nasty weather outside, and I really do believe that was a great decision for sure as well. What is really cool is that we are indeed blessed with all this technology, and no matter how you are in attendance this morning, we are better off gathered here together for sure. Thank you for making the continued commitment and effort so that we can all grow in faith together!

Now, I must say we have an awesome morning on tap! We have already got to hear some pretty cool scriptures for sure. Then, in just a short amount of time, following these 35 pages of my sermon of course, we will also get to welcome Joe into our church family. We will get to witness the skies open up, just like they have for these storms, as the Holy Spirit will descend on him for his baptism. Then, a short while after that we will get to join him at this very table, just like the Last Supper, for his First Holy Communion. Then, to top it off, following the Worship Service we get to go eat. I mean we all get to talk to Joe and welcome him in our Fellowship Hall during our Coffee Hour. Leave it to me to allow food to distract me, I mean I am human, and we are Lutheran after all! I must admit we also have quite a few other distractions than our Coffee Hour and the smell of yummy food coming through the walls. Come on Vince, focus on the message! (deep breath) We have indeed had this storm over the past few days to contend with. It has been something else for sure. We are reminded yet again that it still indeed is winter. However, we also know that spring is just on the horizon for sure as March 19th is right around the corner. That kind of foreshadows our continued journey to the cross with Christ, and how He indeed will rise on the third day. Just like we take comfort in spring coming, we take comfort in Christ springing out of that tomb and rising for each and every one of us for sure on Easter Morning. Speaking of spring, I also see that we all have survived another loss of an hour of sleep as we have sprung forward yet again. I am glad you all managed to change your clocks before you went to bed, or maybe all of your smart phones and devices did it for you while you were sleeping. I mean I still find it rather interesting that there is continued discussion and debate about all this hullabaloo of changing the clocks anyways. However, there never seems to be any movement towards a vote to ending it. Is it really vital, or is it just some nonsense? Does it even serve a purpose; I mean what really is the point? Regardless, time indeed is a very interesting topic for sure. And, that is exactly what is going to bring us right back onto topic here this morning. So, enough of the distractions, it is time to explore the scriptures that we were dealt this week from Lectionary B. I mean we really need to focus so that we can get to the Coffee Hour and eat, I mean welcome Joe, sorry I did it again, food on the brain for sure.

You know, all too often, my primary focus is the Gospel Reading when I stand up here and share with you on Sundays. However, this Sunday is just a little bit different though. This Sunday, right off the bat we dive right back into our first reading from Numbers, as “Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live.” (1) By the way, thanks for reading that for us earlier in our Introduction to Service Vicki.

“As Christians, we are like the people of Israel, the chosen ones, and we are like everyone else too. We too become impatient. We too forget God’s goodness and to rely on him to provide our daily needs.” (5) We learn from our first reading in Numbers that the “snakes certainly did the trick. According to the story, the people acknowledged their sins against God and Moses, repented, and asked Moses to pray to God, that he might take the snakes away from their midst. But God didn’t take the snakes away! He didn’t remove the threat of death, which was the consequence of their sins. Rather, God instructed Moses to make a replica of the snake, and place it on a tall pole, which would be visible to the people. And whenever a person was bitten, they could look at that snake of bronze and live.” (3) Right there, whether we catch it or not, we are reminded that the silly serpent on the pole was not actually what the people were being healed by. They indeed were being healed by having faith, by following the rule set forth by God and the actions taken by Moses. They were going to the pole where the serpent was hanging if they had got bitten. Now, whether you want to call it trickery or not, God actually had them looking up towards Him. That snake on the pole was also a foreshadowing of what was yet to come when the Son of Man would be the very one on that pole. “When Jesus was lifted up, he died! He gave his life for you and for me, and for all who might look upon him, lifted on that rough-hewn pole, in order that we might be delivered from the consequences of our sins. As a result, the cross of Christ deserves more than just a casual glance, a few moments of our time on Sunday mornings, which we set aside for worship, among the other activities that occupy our week.” (3) We are also reminded that “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.” (1) What blessings we have for sure, and I am glad you get to experience it this morning here Joe, and I am glad we all get to be reminded of our very baptisms again by witnessing yours!

Today we also may very well encounter one of the most famous verses in the Bible being John 3:16. I mean I could have very easily stood up here and preached on that very famous, and most wonderful verse the entire time. However, I know a good majority of you are extremely familiar with that verse. It kind of becomes a right of passage when you are introduced to the faith, and it kind of becomes our backbone as we come to realize that there is no way we could or can do anything on our own. Without this very sacrifice, without this real version of things, without this commitment to us as human beings and God’s very own creation we would not be blessed or able to have the lives we have. We would not have the forever guarantee of eternal life with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit one day following our lives here on this ball of mud.

This is also why we trek through seasons, not just in a weather and climate format, but seasons within our church calendar and church year. This is why we have “The season of Lent (to) remind us of the Savior that was lifted up. It reminds us that Jesus suffered the Cross not only for us – but because of us. The season of Lent reminds us that when we sin – we have a Savior. We have God’s cure and God’s solution for our sin. Most of all, the season of Lent reminds us that: “God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”” (4)

As we begin to wrap things up here to go to our coffee hour and eat… I mean as we begin to wrap this sermon up so we can go back out there and fly home with our umbrellas… I mean as we go out there and row our boats home… okay, okay I mean as we look back on our readings, we are reminded that “The very thing that caused death to Israel in the wilderness was also to give them continued life. How odd to look upon the very thing for life that also gave death. As the people of Israel looked upon the raised serpent on the pole, no, much more than that, gazed upon, focused, studied the bronze serpent it would change their life. The bronze serpent on the pole would remind the people of the scars of judgement, the scars of impatience, and the scars of not trusting God. As the people gazed upon the bronze serpent they were moved to repentance and renewed life. Renewed life does not come without repentance. God in his continued love for us was willing to exchange our scars of judgement, our guilt, our shame, and our pain for life. The bitten people of Israel were not only physically healed but also their whole spirit was renewed. They continued a joyful life with God. In the middle of judgement there (indeed) is mercy.” (5) “As persons who are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection, we are, as Luther maintained, “to daily die to sin, and rise to newness of life.”” (3)

We are also reminded and recall that “Jesus, Son of man was betrayed, suffered, crucified, and put to death on the cross. Who did it? We did it. As we look upon the cross, no, much more than that, as we gaze upon it, focus, and study the crucified Jesus on the cross we are reminded of what we have done. Through our impatience we have betrayed God, and everyone else. We have not trusted God or anyone else. We have caused suffering to God and all humankind. On the cross is all our sin towards God and to all people. That is why the son of man has been raised on a pole, to remind us of our sin, to draw us to repentance, and above all else to give us renewed life. Jesus has taken upon himself the sin of the world in exchange for life.” (5) Something we could never do for or by ourselves, and something for that fact that we do not even have to try to do for or by ourselves. We are also reminded from our second reading from Ephesians today that “8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” (1) I encourage you to go out and share that gift with others!

Amen.

**References**

(1) Sundays and Seasons

 Preaching

 Year B 2024

 March 10th, 2024

 Fourth Sunday in Lent

(2) Bible.com

(3) SermonCentral.com

 The Cross Is No Idol

 Contributed by Ronald Harbaugh on Mar 25, 2006

 Scripture: John 3:14-21

 Denomination: Lutheran

(4) SermonCentral.com

 God's Answer For The Snake Bit

 Contributed by Eloy Gonzalez on Mar 20, 2012

 Scripture: John 3:14-21

 Denomination: Lutheran

(5) SermonCentral.com

 Mercy In Judgement

 Contributed by Martin Ellgar on Dec 14, 2014

 Scripture: John 3:14-21

 Denomination: Lutheran

**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.

 4From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around

 the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. 5The 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.” 6Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people,

 and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7The 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.

 8And 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.” 9So 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**

 While we were dead in our sinfulness, God acted to make us alive as a gift of

 grace in Christ Jesus. We are saved not by what we do but by grace through

 faith. Thus our good works are really a reflection of God’s grace at work in our

 lives.

 1You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2in 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. 3All 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. 4But God,

 who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5even when we

 were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace

 you have been saved—6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the

 heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the ages to come he might show the

 immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8For by

 grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the

 gift of God—9not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10For we are

 what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God

 prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

**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.

 [Jesus said:] 14“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the

 Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

 16“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.

 17“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. 18Those 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. 19And this is the

 judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness

 rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the

 light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But

 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.”