

No one wants to hear a story about snakes. If you have a good snake story, keep it to yourself, no one wants to hear it, think about what it looks like. Today's OT reading, snakes, a snake on a tree, certainly reminisce of the Fall, a tree and a snake, a curse, Jesus tells us it's all to see Him, cursed, lifted upon a tree.

What is it you see when you think of your life? What are you focusing on? What is it you see, focus on in difficult days? In busy days or good times without a moment to stop and think? What is your focus? We get distracted with the news, what tomorrow brings.

God's people 3200 years ago are not unlike you. In a wilderness where only God can take care of you. In spite of constant care, with provisions of water, bread from heaven, having garments that do not wear out, after a watery deliverance out of slavery, death. With them every moment every day, God's love, God's care, God's faithfulness. They forgot about what He had done to the Egyptians, the plagues, the pillars of fire and cloud, the Red Sea, how He took care of them and gave them life in the midst of all kinds of dangers, and they are so quick to complain, and all your complaints are really against God, God you haven't done enough, you haven't given me better people, you haven't given me a better job, you haven't given me a better family life, you have made me better, and on and on. Stop! Repent. Like them, how you focus on yourself; focus on the wrong things, fail to see what is your life. Think God owes you more.

Jesus is speaking with Nicodemus in John 3. Nicodemus knew that snake story, all the history. Jesus just told him **you must be born from above, water and Spirit, to see the Kingdom of God.** Tells him what happened then, is that you see, it's all about Jesus. **As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man (the Christ) be lifted up. For God loved the world that** -He did this -put His Son on the pole of the cross. That a world of people bitten by the satanic serpent not perish in the fires of hell, but have life.

Later in John, Jesus speaks: He is the one, who took care of them in the wilderness, now comes a greater water deliverance in baptism, that He is very bread of heaven, Himself, now very, real, true food and drink, eat His flesh and blood, to have eternal life. Jesus will speak again of being lifted-up on a cross His glory, draw all people to Himself.

We have all been scared of the dark. And still. It's intriguing Jesus first account of teaching in John is in darkness. Darkness, Light themes run throughout. Nicodemus comes at night to be taught by Jesus. You can't see well at night, lose focus.

There are dark days, dark times for each of us. Darkness of this chaotic world, evil that surrounds you, darkness of depression, darkness even inside your own heart. We all have places of darkness, that consume our time, our energy, lose sleep, and loneliness; places of darkness often private. When someone asks, "How are you?" you always say, "I'm fine."

How are you to see? How do you stay focused? What do you look at? See the gradual. **O come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus.** When we take our eyes off of Jesus, lose sight of our true life; the devil can fill your eyes, your hearts, your minds with all kinds of stuff. You can be sure that Satan, satanic dark forces work against you, everyone you love. Not necessarily evil, but enough to keep you looking at other things, to lose sight of Jesus.

O come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus. what Lent is all about: to see what we've done, repent. To see He is your life; your means to live and survive in a wilderness.

How foolish it would have seemed to see, look at a serpent on a pole and be healed, live. As foolish as water poured over a baby, a piece of bread and sip of wine. But what is foolishness, nonsense to man is the life-giving gifts of His kingdom. The very means of grace by which God gives Himself, His kingdom.

Your God is a God of means. No one knows John 3:16 unless it is understood with Moses, Nicodemus, to see a crucifix. Means of Baptism, the Eucharist, the Word, Him lifted-up in glory upon a hellish tree, for all to see.

I have know idea what a relationship with God is, apart from the very real, concrete means of an altar, a font, a pulpit. This Word, this Word preached, His Sacraments. There is no other way to know God, to be saved, even for you now, to be healed. To have Light in darkness.

What comfort Jesus enters your wilderness, your darkness. See this! Never lose sight of this. Bask in His light, His healing, continues in this sacred place, with His means of grace, joins His life to you, that you live and not ever die.