

4 S. in Lent 3/14/21
John 3:14-21 B

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT IN ORDER THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM.

“Thou shalt not”...Thou shalt not eat meat on Friday...Thou shalt not dance...thou shalt not play cards...thou shalt not wear makeup...thou shalt not drink coffee {knew I’d get you Lutherans with that one}. And “you must”...you must wear the correct undergarments...you must give 10% of your income to the poor...you must make a pilgrimage at least once in your life to the holy city {I will let you fill in the blank as to what the holy city is}

These are the rules, the laws, the traditions of men, made up by men to make you right with God. Sadly, unfortunately, in the weakness of our flesh we buy into it ... that somehow, someday, I can gain God’s favor, get brownie points with God, make myself more pleasing to God if I do or don’t do ... well, fill in the blank. Today we hear Jesus say to us,

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

We don’t need more rules, new laws, to follow; they only condemn us. We need grace – God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Christianity is about Jesus, what He has done and still does for us and for our salvation. This is what Jesus Himself is teaching us in our Gospel lesson. And, He does it by using a lesson from the Old Testament, a lesson His Jewish audience would readily know.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” That’s our Old Testament lesson this morning. God delivered the Israelites from the land of death. He opened His hand to keep them alive. But, it wasn’t long before they became impatient, angry, and thankless towards the gifts of God. They grumbled – against God, against Moses; they even thought they had life better under the heavy hand of their Egyptian masters. To drive His children back to contrition and faith, God sent fiery serpents to bite the people. Deadly, toxic venom flowed through their veins. They confessed and cried to their intercessor Moses. Moses prayed, and God spoke, instructing His servant to set a bronze serpent on a pole that came with the divine promise that everyone bitten, when they gaze at that bronze serpent, would live. Think about that for a moment – all the rules and regulations of men, new laws, all the traditions of men would not have saved them from those snakes. God instructed them to look at that serpent and nothing else, so that they would be saved.

In the Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus uses this Old Testament account to point us to Himself. As the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up on the cross so that people would believe in Him and have eternal life.

You need to look to Jesus because you have poison flowing through your veins. Scripture calls it sin. The venom of sin has poisoned your heart and it shows in your thoughts, words, and deeds.

We are to call upon God’s name in trouble, prayer, praise, and give thanks, but it’s just easier to trust in lady luck.

We are to hold God’s Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it, but how quick we are to doubt God’s Word ... especially where Christ promises He is with us always and all things work together for our good. And we are

even quicker to ignore those parts of it that we don't like, that conflict with the way we want to live our – our – lives.

We are not to hurt or harm our neighbor in his/her body. We are not to keep anger and hatred in our hearts against our neighbor. But, you do, don't you? You wish harm and ruin on your neighbor; and just can't wait until "they get their's".

God's Word teaches us that we are to lead a sexually pure and decent life. Ya right, who believes that anymore?

Rather than helping our neighbor, we think we're # 1 and look out for # 1. So, we lie, steal, cheat, cut down our neighbor with vicious, savage words to get ahead, and see nothing wrong with it.

My Dear Friends in Christ, the season of Lent again reminds us that the Christian life is the life of repentance. We are sorrowful for our sin and we look in faith to Jesus for forgiveness and life. God knows that we don't need more rule and regulations, more laws, more traditions of men, because they only condemn us. We need grace. That's why Jesus speaks the words of perhaps the most treasured verse in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son".

All the rules and regulations, all the laws, all the traditions of men do not take sin away. The Bible teaches us that the only thing that takes sin away is blood, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins," the book of Hebrews says (9:22). And, the blood of the Son of Man was poured out when He was lifted up on the cross.

All those times you grew impatient, angry, and thankless towards the gifts of God; all those times you grumbled against God; all those times the sin in your heart showed itself in your thoughts, words, or deeds; were all laid on God's only-begotten Son and He carried them to the cross. There,

His blood painted that wood, as He suffered and died for you, for your sin. What sweet comfort there is for us in this: “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all – all -- sin” (1 Jn 1:7).

You and I, sinners that we are, are not saved by obeying, keeping, observing, rules and regulations, laws, traditions; we are saved by Jesus dying on the cross. God lifted up Jesus Christ on the cross so that you can look to Him in faith and live, just as the Israelites looked to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up and were saved.

You have something in common with those Israelites in our Old Testament lesson. The word “Israelite” means “wanderer”. You, Dear Child of God, are a wanderer on this side of heaven. You know that truth from the much-loved hymn, “I’m but a stranger here”. As strangers here, our citizenship is in heaven. But oh, how this world tries to squeeze us into its mold, so that we live by its rule and regulations, its laws, values and rules.

From the earliest of ages, we are not immune from it. Children are taught if they don’t wear the right designer labels on their clothes, if they don’t rebel against authority; they don’t matter, they’re not important. And it doesn’t stop just because we become adults. Life, the world teaches, is all about toys. More money, bigger house, that means you – you – are a better person. The world would have us believe that our identity is in all the outward stuff of this world. Even as workers, the world squeezes us to believe that must back-bite, gossip, cheat to get ahead. And marriage, that most intimate structure known to mankind, is not immune from the rules and regulations of a world dark in sin. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, St. Paul tells us that the relationship between husband and wife is a very picture of Christ and His bride, the Church. And, yet how often does a wife

bow the knee to the god of this world to think she does not have to obey her husband. And, husbands, husbands, how often rather than loving your wife as Christ loves the Church, have you criticized and condemned and been harsh with your bride because she didn't meet your sinful expectations.

But Dear Christian Friends, Be of good cheer! This world in all its perversity and sinful man is not your judge. God is, and we read, "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him" (v.17).

What a precious gift we have in Jesus! All the rules, the laws, the traditions, the silly and sinful expectations of men do not make us right with God. Jesus makes us right with God. Jesus, who came to save us, who gives us perfect peace, who gives us only comfort and love.