

Fourth Sunday in Lent (2018)

John 3:14–21 And *as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up*, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For this is how God loved the world: 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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God.”

In the Name of Jesus.

Holy Baptism! Praise be to You, Our Holy Spirit from Christ! For you have GIVEN us birth from Above! And we may ask Our Heavenly Father with boldness and confidence without bound! So shall it be! Amen!

The words of John Three today were addressed to a good man who acted not all that good. Instead of coming into the light—to Jesus, in the day, with all the people being baptized by the disciples—Nicodemus came, the text records for us, ‘at night.’ It saves us to read that!

For when the Lord spoke of darkness, there was the Pharisee, with Him, in the darkness. And when He spoke of condemnation for those who refused to come into the light, He was condemning that good man, whose hope was in Moses. The verdict! LIGHT has come into the world, but men were attached to—that’s what LOVE is in the Bible, Old Testament and New!—men are always and only ATTACHED to the darkness.

Nicodemus at night; Judas and the holy thugs coming to the Garden at night; and you, I, all, when we delude ourselves into thinking that God our Maker is someone we can sidle up to in any way that is closed off to anyone else. If Moses was good for anything, he was good for tripping up Israel of old, to show in broad daylight the verdict of God laid down on His own people.

But now: ‘In the same way, the Son of Man must be lifted up!’ Rejoice, dear Christians! God the Eternal Son is now ONLY happy when He is identified as one of us!

What's going to lift up the Son of Man on the cross? The same thing that lifted up the serpent on the pole in the wilderness: Moses. The crowd that Nicodemus was talking about, when he came to Jesus at night and sidled on up to Jesus and tried to flatter: 'WE know you are from God; ME and my earnest group, devoted to Moses. THAT, you must know, Mary's Son, is a GREAT recommendation!'

On which, Jesus slams the door! 'You and your dedicated group, Nicodemus: Y'all must be born from ABOVE!'

And, of course, since the man thought—in some twisted way!—that he was a devotee of Moses, Nicodemus started to think about what HE must do! 'How can a man climb back in the womb, etc?!'

My dear ones, there are TWO—count them, TWO deeds that we may ONLY happily boast are 'done in God,' for though laid upon us, they are utterly beyond us; Moses too! They are, ONE: LOOKING at the snake on the pole; AND, TWO: looking at the SNAKE on the pole!

Or, they are ONE: BELIEVING in God's King, His Son; and, TWO: believing in the SON!

In other words: COMING into the light, so that our deeds are exposed—great woe! And, TWO: coming into the LIGHT—where the Son RULES! Where the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world!

John Three removes BOTH of these deeds from US—praise the Lord!—and reveals that they are ONLY done, as the text says, ‘In God.’

Thank...the...Holy Spirit...for...your...Baptism!

I spent a glorious afternoon with our brother Charlie and his better half this week. How long was it, dear Charlie, before WE trotted out a name and expressed disappointment?! I’m talking about ME, not you and Sue! I was kicking myself after such a happy communion together: that even in the heights of our joys in Christ, other poor sinners still come off so poorly!

So, my dear ones, Yes! Your pastor is no different from Y’ALL! But if I may count on being born from above as a child of God as a gift: just WHOEVER can also! ‘Whoever believes in Him....!’

This episode with Nicodemus is not recorded so that we may wag our heads and cluck at the silly old man. That man buried our Lord, from the cross...IN...THE...DAYLIGHT! Finally! All it took was the public shaming of the King of ABOVE!

The same crucifixion that it took to draw the likes of you and me to repentance and faith too.

‘God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world!’ (Why even bring UP condemnation? Oh! Because pastor may stop by your house one day and put you in danger!)

‘But that the WORLD through Him would be saved!’

This episode was recorded to save us; then to SAVE us!

First, tiny, baby steps of being a child of God MAY lead to a godly march through this world for the glory of God and the good of the world. OR, it may be the first steps of a rotten, little brat, who thinks that by walking out into the sunshine, he actually MAKES the sun shine!

Nicodemus made that mistake with Moses; as all men do with their religions and philosophies and sciences and laws: ‘Here’s what I GOT that others cannot reach!’

But infinitely more disastrous is when the children of God, born of water and the Spirit, fed with Christ’s Body and Blood, darken what is so well lit!

Christ has saved the world! (And our list of those who repel us is HOW long?)

The Son of Man laid down His Life and picked it up, for the Life of the WORLD! (And what slice of the world is not worth YOUR bother, dear child of God? Mine is, I regret to say, quite a slice!)

I don’t bring these things up to make you despair!
Just the opposite! These things SAVE us!

For if we ever learn to behave, stumble along with the Ten Commandments as a rough guide—that is ALL work GIVEN from ABOVE!

And it is the work from Above, all gift from Above, when we first rejoice that the Law may make distinctions,

but the Gospel does not!

And then, when we finally get it—that even THAT REJOICING goes on all the while we are continually, incessantly sinning!—

Then the WORLD sees a great light! If Heaven Above even saves creepy old Nicodemus, slinking around in the dark; if the Holy Spirit can make His Home with your poor preacher; and if the Eternal Son is only happy when He is identified with all MEN—

Then we must be surely saved!

When your next temptation approaches, my dear ones, live as born from above! Call on God your Father to save you from sin and temptation, and from His ape, the devil. MOSES is good for knowing what a sin is; but our BAPTISM, our CONFIDENCE that we are secure with God in a way so utterly out of our hands—

That saves us FROM SIN!

MAYBE from DOING SIN!

CERTAINLY from trying to carry on our shoulder sin that the Lamb of God has already taken away!

Oh! And as we come into THAT LIGHT—how many times a day can we remove weights from others that the Son of Man never intended for them to carry?! Simply by OUR attachment to poor, weak men, lost in the dark; by OUR Love in the Name of Jesus? Amen!