

## **Promise of Salvation**

Promise of Lent: Part 4 “Promise of Salvation”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – March 14, 2021

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

**Readings:** Numbers 21:4-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

**Reflection:** Psalm 107:1-3,17-22

**Greeting:** Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. (*Isaiah 2:5,3c*)

**Prayer:** Everlasting God, because of your tender mercy toward all people, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon himself our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all should follow the example of his great humility. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of his patience through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 107

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. (Psalm 107:1-3,17-22 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 107 and we hear of God’s redeeming love. That when we cry out, the Lord hears us and saves us. How do you praise God for his unending love? How do you show that love to others? How can we show our gratitude to God for all that has been done for us? How can we share God’s love?

**Prayer:** Almighty God, your blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan. Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations. And, as you know the weakness of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save. May you hear our prayer and guide us in these 40 days on our way to the cross; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Numbers chapter 21, verses 4 through 9.

*From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The 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." Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The 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. And 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." So 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. (Numbers 21:4-9 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading is from Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 through 10.

*You were dead through the trespasses and sins in 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. All 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. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life. (Ephesians 2:1-10 NRSV\*)*

Our last reading is from John chapter 3, verses 14 through 21.

*And just 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 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. "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. Those 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. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But 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." (John 3:14-21 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We continue this week with our Lenten series about promises. And this week we look at the promise of salvation. And we have two readings today that line up incredibly well with the parallels in the story that they create. And the first is from Numbers. We have the Israelites in the wilderness and they're once again complaining. They accuse God of having Moses lead the people into the wilderness to die. So, God sends poisonous serpents among the people, biting them, and killing them. They ask Moses to beg God that they could be saved. Moses is to put a bronze serpent on a pole and hold it up for the people to see. And when the people look, they'll be saved. Now this comes into play because it is directly referred to in our Gospel reading today. That "just 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." It's interesting that this parallel was drawn. Because Jesus was having a conversation with Nicodemus and they are talking about a lot of things, but one of those is that Christ didn't come to condemn, but to save. The parallel that is drawn is that just as the people were looking to escape death would look up to the bronze serpent on the pole, that we may look to Christ on the cross and be saved, that it will save our lives. However, the message isn't "I'm saving you from what you deserve" as much as "Here is my compassion." Because the promise being made is one that we can seek salvation, and that the door is open to us. That we can be saved from many things. Saved from a life live simply for the gain of things, saved from a life lived with no purpose at all. To be free from selfishness, to live a life of truth, so that everyone who believes may find eternal life.

Part of our journey to the cross during Lent that we have been exploring is how we make our way to this promise. Sometimes it can be hard as we make our way to the cross to remember a fully divine and fully human Christ because it's easy to focus in on the divinity. Because looking at the human aspect can almost be too painful. It can also make us feel like we should be better. That if Christ was fully human that means that his compassion could be our compassion. That his love could be our love. That his mercy could be our mercy. That as humans we are just as capable of love and grace as the man who gave his life so that we would understand that "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." We can get lost in the divine and it casts a shadow over the humanity of Christ. We don't like looking at doubts and fears and we don't like looking at worries as we get closer and closer to the cross, knowing that a man goes to die so that we may live. And that he does so out of a great love. That we are saved by His mercy. That, yes, Jesus is the fully divine Son of God. But I cannot forget that he's also the fully human Son of Man.

Thinking about the two narratives that we get in Numbers and John, the parallel is that we look to be saved because of our failings. And that we are saved in great compassion. With Moses, it was look and believe. Look and believe and you'll be saved. Look at the serpent and know that God is God, and God is saving you. In John, it is look to Christ and know that Christ is there to save. Not to bring death but to bring salvation. To bring light into a world of

darkness. So, we must be a people that cling to that light. For me, I like to think about Christ's humanity in of all this. Someone who gets scared. Someone who gets angry. Someone who cries. Because I feel closer to Christ because of that. And at the same time, it makes that promise of salvation that much deeper and harder, because I think of a friend giving his life for mine. That's quite the weight, a weight that can be hard to bear. A weight that can cast a heavy burden on one's shoulders. But we are not called to be full of sorrow. That we are to understand that Christ died so that we could live because it was his great love for us, God's great love for us, that would save us. But we are worthy of salvation. I have to say that again, that we are worthy of salvation.

And so, part of my personal reflection in Lent is that I have to ask myself, what does Christ see in me as a friend that makes him think I am worthy? And that's a difficult question to face. Because Christ is the one that finds us worthy. I know that I must find something because the promise of salvation is there. And if the promise of salvation is there, there always will be something that can be redeemed in me. Even when I feel unworthy, I know that Christ sees me with eyes know something more than I do. Even when I feel like I'm not good enough and I should not even lift my eyes to the cross, a voice of love tells me to look and be saved. When I feign to think of someone suffering and dying on my behalf, I am told it is done out of love. And because it was done in love, I should love. And it gives me strength, and it gives me hope. It also gives me a determination. A determination that this isn't something I keep to myself and it's not something that I hold over others. I should never look down on others as much as I should pray that I want them to be saved as I know I am saved. I am moved by a great love and compassion that says that I am worthy. That I want others to know they are worthy. That I want to shout down those voices that say that they are not. Because I know that all can look and be saved. That God is there for all people. That Christ is there with open arms, full of love, offering salvation to all. Not to those who are already perfect but those who wish to be perfected in Christ. Not to those that are already leading a righteous life and need no help at all. But open to those who stumble and fall and those who make mistakes. That the path is open to flawed people. And I'm reminded that Christ did not come into the world to save the righteous, but to save sinners, such as me. That no matter how much I may want to beat up on myself and how much I want to look down on myself, Christ is there to lift me up and remind me that I am worthy. And if I am worthy, I need to share the message to others to let them know that salvation is a gift that is there for all and salvation is open to all. Because that's the message of the cross. Look at what love has done and be saved. Look at what love has done and be saved. Look and know that you are welcome. That is what brings me to reflection in this time of Lent, contemplating that salvation and that wondrous love for me, wondering how I can share it. So, in this Lent, as I reflect on the promise of salvation, I hope that God the Father will give us the strength we need. That we may follow the path of Christ the Son, our Savior. That we may be guided by the Holy Spirit to open up that door to all, that all may know the love that was shown through sacrifice. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. In these forty days, may God's grace be shown to us all, cleansing us from our sins, and restoring us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## **Our Current Series – Promise of Lent**

Our series is *Promise of Lent* and looks at the ways that we view God's promises during the season of Lent. Each week we look at the promises in a different light.

February 21st – *Promise of New Beginnings* - Genesis 9:8-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

February 28th – *Promise Everlasting* – Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

March 7th – *Promise of Justice* – Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

March 14th – *Promise of Salvation* – Numbers 21:4-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

March 21st – *Promise and Patience* – Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

## **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

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