

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Fourth Sunday in Lent - Year B
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Numbers 21:3-9
Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
Ephesians 2:1-10
John 3:14-21
03/10/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John,

[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.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Hidden in the Dark

Good morning! For those of you that don't know, I love detailing cars. What most detailers find the most enjoyable is paint correction. This is the process where we use a variety of machines to compound, correct, and polish the paint to perfection. When I look at a car the first thing I look for is paint swirls caused by those horrible automatic car washes that basically sand the paint "clean." But when a detailer is working to correct the paint on a car the most important tool in their arsenal is light. We need to SEE what we're doing. Walking into a detailers workshop is like staring into the sun. Because it's only under a bright light source that we can see the progress as we try to bring the paint to perfection. The light shines and shows us all mistakes.

It's the same in today's readings. Our Gospel reading is well known for vs. 16, but we're going to take a step back and look at the larger narrative. In our text from the Gospel of John we see Jesus speaking to Nicodemus, but what's interesting is that Nicodemus has come to speak to Jesus under the cover of darkness. He doesn't want to be seen with Jesus, so he hides from the light. I think we forget how dark night really is when you have no artificial light. Even in a major city like Jerusalem there were no street lights to guide a person home in the evening. I always imagine Nicodemus sneaking from corner to corner, hiding behind wagon carts and other places of shadow.

But Jesus cuts through the secrecy and calls him out. In fact, we're all called out, just like the Israelites in our first reading from Numbers. Jesus references the story in our text, a time when the Israelite are forced to deal

with their sin. In a powerful story Moses mounts the object of their literal doubt and disbelief and forces the Israelites to face their sin before they can be healed. It's a confession! Before they can be healed, they have to confront the way they failed to believe in God. The sin is brought into the light, and until they literally look at what they have done, they can't move on.

It's why I find this Gospel passage so powerful. Jesus reminds Nicodemus that we would all prefer to stay hidden, to stay safe in the dark where our secrets remain secrets. But God calls us out, literally and figuratively. The first few verses of our Gospel speak about God's redemptive work. Take a listen: *"15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16For 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. 17Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

But listen to how we respond in the next few verses: *"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."*

The light has come into the world but we literally choose darkness. I have been re-reading Lord of the Rings and think of us like Shelob, the light of a star, or "sun" literally hurts us. So we choose to remain in the darkness.

Which brings us to the beginning of our service. Have you ever thought about how strange it is to start with the Confession and Forgiveness? In a society that rarely if ever admits fault, we gather together and the FIRST thing we do corporately is stand and admit to God and each other that we have failed, that we have sinned. Then we hear those words of hope and healing. God forgives! When I was young I always preferred the words of forgiveness where the ordained minister spoke those powerful words that I now say to you. Our sin is not the last word, we can turn from the darkness and into the light: *“I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”*¹ Amen.

¹ Lutheran Book of Worship, p. 56.