

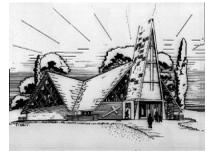


Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon for Reminiscere (Proper Lent 2A)

*Jesus is lifted up on the Cross!*

St. John's Lutheran Parish



Shelly Beach



• [The Word of God for this Sermon is written in John 3, 1-17:](#)

• **ESV** 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

• 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

• 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

• 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

• 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

• 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

• 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

• 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

• 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

• 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?

• 11 Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.

• 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

• 13 No one has ascended into heaven except him who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

• 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

• 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

• 16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

• 17 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.

• *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will hear Your sound and be enlightened. Amen.*

• **Dear Beloved of the Father!**

- On their wanderings through the wilderness the Israelites lost courage and faith in God. They became short-tempered with God. They complained against Moses and God saying, “Why have you brought us out of Egypt only to kill us in the desert? There is neither bread nor water!” In response, as punishment, God sent into the people the fiery, deadly serpents. When bitten by the snakes, the people died. Those still alive, repentant of their sin, pleaded with Moses, who asked God on their behalf to save them from the serpents.
- Moses was instructed to make a snake of bronze and set it upon a pole, as a sign. Whoever was bitten by a deadly snake, could look up to the lifted-up snake and live. What a sign!
- Someone called this a counter-intuitive sign! What is meant by this? Who wants to look at a thing for salvation that looks just like the thing that has bitten you? Normally we don’t want to look at the thing that harmed us. We want to look away, to something else for help. But, at this time God commanded His people to face an enlarged bronze sign of the very thing that bit them! This bronze snake was lifted up on a pole for everyone to see.
- In the Gospel of John, in our passage for today, we learn that this bronze-snake-sign was a foreshadow of Christ. Christ was lifted up on the Cross, for us to see and live! He had to be lifted up, in the same way, says the Holy Spirit through John. Whoever believes in Him, the ONE lifted up on the cross, has eternal Life.
- And in this context, we need to hear the well-known verse John 3,16 in a more accurate way, according to what actually is found in the Greek: *“For in this way God loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*
- In this way God loved the world- it emphasises the fact that Jesus was lifted up on the cross, just like the bronze-serpent was lifted up in the wilderness. The emphasis is not on “so much” God loved the world, although that in itself is not a wrong idea. But the Holy Spirit through John wants us to take a good look at the way in which God loved the world and did something for its salvation.
- Jesus being lifted up on the Cross is not a pretty sight! In fact, its gory, its blood, its terrible, a horrible sight. Its interesting that most crosses we wear and display are shown without the blood and Jesus is always covered up. In reality this was not the case. He was a serious picture of shame, blood and suffering. God’s own Word said that to be crucified meant to be cursed by God. A person crucified in that way, spells sin! You had to be a serious offender to deserve crucifixion. Those few pictures you find on Google showing Him naked and full of wounds, we rather not use them. They are too much for us.
- But God says, this is MY Way in which I love the world! That is why Jesus was lifted up!

That is the sign of God that He loves the world. Its much more than a sign, the act of God in history in which He loves the world!

• Now, according to our reason, to say the least, this is an awkward way of saving us! If we keep lifting up of the bronze snake and the lifting up of Jesus together, we have to say, the very thing we want to run away from, God put up in front of us to look at, for our salvation! Sin killed Jesus! The sin of the world caused Jesus to be crucified. He was falsely accused and Pilate was forced to twist the Roman Law to have Jesus crucified.

• So, what do we see there, in Jesus hanging on the cross? We see the sins of the world and we see our sins. We see the results of our fighting in desires, words and deeds, our wounding one another. Look at the world, at its state. Then look at the wounded and thorn-crowned Body of the Son of Man. That is how people mess with one another. And our messing with others is captured there too. The wounds we inflicted and the wounds we have received by others hurting us- that is what we see on Jesus lifted up on the Cross! And the sins like slandering others, shaming others, blaspheming Christ, our neighbours, speaking evil and meaning evil- its all there. That is why we don't like to look at Him like that, in that terrible state. We rather choose the photo-shopped version, the clean cross. Its too much shame to see our Lord, or to imagine our Lord naked and shamed like that, on the cursed cross.

• This Way of God feels awkward to us, if one really looks at the uncensored version. That is why even some mainline churches try their very best to do away with the "must" of Jesus' Crucifixion. They say, people nowadays don't like this way of salvation. Its just too awful, to think that a loving God would do something like this. Isn't there a better way without all that blood and wounds etc.?

• This is where the depth of what the Holy Spirit speaks to us through John comes through and shows its astonishing light. He opens our eyes to see more than what the eye can see!

• In verse 17 of our passage we hear, *"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."* In other words, this whole act of God is an act of God's mercy and goodness. This is not God's Way of condemning the world and us, although God is putting our sins right in our faces! The Gospel of John speaks of Jesus Crucifixion as the Glory of God. This act of God is the very answer to Nicodemus' question, how a new birth can take place! This is God's new beginning! It is the fulfilment of the whole of the OT Scriptures! But, how on earth do these all fit together?

• Now, we have to keep in mind what John the Baptist gave witness of, right in the beginning of the Gospel. He said that Jesus is the Lamb of God, the sacrificial Lamb, that

takes away the sins of the world. Do you hear that? Sins are taken away- that is the main purpose of Jesus' baptismal ministry, as Lamb of God. How are they taken away? By Jesus death on the Cross. [Isaiah 53, 3-5]:"*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed.*"

• Do you see your sins and wounds? Yes, there you see them on Him, your wounds, your sins your evil desires, they are all their with Him! And He was lifted up to be crucified. That is your sins and your wounds are crucified with Him. Yes, your old Adam is crucified with Him. This gift you have received in Baptism. He took and He still takes your sins and wounds away! That means, if they were crucified with Him, they are not with you any more!

• He takes them away it says. He does so ongoing. You can always run to Him, so that you can get rid of them. Once our sins are taken away, once our blindness is removed, we see the kingdom in the One who is lifted up on the Cross for us! There, when He was lifted up, begins the new kingdom, because there our sins, our blindness, our urge to always be right, to fight for our self-righteousness, there it is crucified, condemned by God. You don't have to be like that any more!

• This is your birth from above, because your old Adam is dead, is crucified. Jesus death is your new life. His wounds are your healing. If someone wounds you, come to Him, because He carries those wounds for you. If you sin, come to Him, He takes your sins away, He speaks forgiveness onto you. He takes care of the evil you do and of the evil that is inflicted on you. He was lifted once and for all on the Cross and that took care of all wounds and sins of the world. He continues to serve you to take care of your sins one hundred percent effective.

• Faith is this, trusting Him to be the Lamb that takes away your sins. This gift gives a new life to you. You are not alone with your sins and wounds any more. You have a Lamb, who takes those away from you. And you participate in a Body of people where this happens to all people around you. This is the kingdom of heaven reaching onto earth!

• Let your light shine to others who are still clinging to their own sins and wounds. The Son of Man has been lifted up, also for them. Thank you, dearest Jesus! **Amen.**

• *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. [Phil 4,7].*