

A Very Strange Story About Snakes and Salvation

Fourth Week of Lent - John 3 14-21

Jesus makes a very strange reference in the scripture this week. **“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”** The reference to a serpent comes out of an Old Testament story (Numbers 21:4-9) in which the Israelites who, lacking in faith and fidelity to God, are being punished by a plague of poisonous snakes that wreak havoc and despair on the people.

Only after God tells Moses to place an image of a bronze serpent onto a pole, and then elevate it for the people to see, are they saved from this punishment. This is a strange but interesting story because it has to do with God’s infinite mercy and Jesus’ ultimate promise of eternal salvation.

John wrote into this gospel his theology of salvation. John affirms God’s continual intervention into human history. Humanity, starting with Adam and Eve, has continued to challenge God’s authority. God provides goodness and then the people sin. God provides mercy and reconciliation with his people only to have them sin again. The pattern is the same. God establishes the covenant and the people break it.

John is addressing this very thing in today’s gospel. Jesus is now the visible sign of the invisible God. It will take Jesus’ sacrificial death to make a new and eternal covenant with God’s people. It will be the image of the cross, exalted for all to see, that will become the new sign of salvation.

Jesus has entered the world in human form. Jesus will leave the world in a human death. His death will be the ultimate price for our eternal life. The light that has entered into our world is the mercy of God fully realized in Christ.

Jesus brings with him the ultimate and everlasting image of God’s fidelity and love. We are called to believe in this truth. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”**

Happy Lent!


Sue Schettler