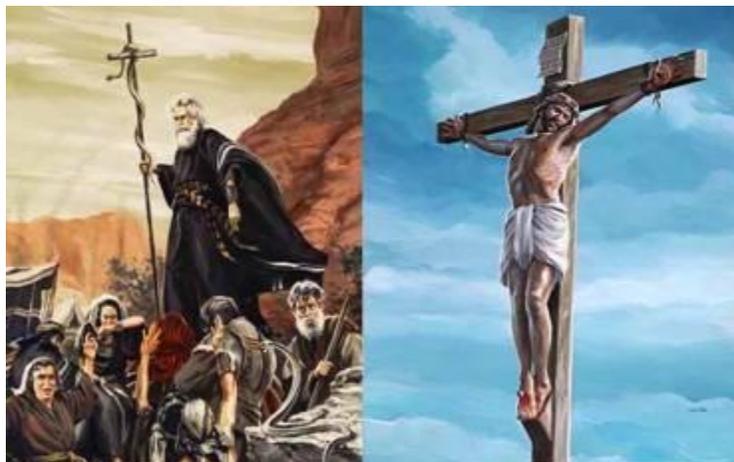


Fourth Sunday of Lent



“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, what whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:14)

Moses saves the Jewish people through the staff that he plunges into the Red Sea causing the waters to be lifted up and allowing the Jews to escape and Jesus saves sinful humanity by being lifted up and dying on a cross. The covenant of old is thus linked to the covenant in Jesus' blood. Both Jew and Gentile share in God's salvation!



Abba John said, 'I am like a man sitting under a great tree, who sees wild beasts and snakes coming against him in great numbers. When he cannot withstand them any longer, he runs to climb the tree and is saved. It is just the same with me; I sit in my cell and I am aware of evil thoughts coming against me, and when I have no more strength against them, I take refuge in God by prayer and I am saved from the enemy.'

Abba John understood well the great value of prayer in lifting our hearts, minds, and souls to the Lord in times of great trial and temptation. The story he shares, highlights for us the need for an exit strategy whenever we're confronted by hostile or dangerous forces or sinfully tempting situations in life. All of our exist strategies must include one common denominator if they are to

be successful: They must all involve a turning to God as the ultimate source of our salvation!

Sometimes, this turning to God is accomplished in prayer, when we give all our pressing cares and needs over to God and dispose ourselves to accepting God's will--- whatever it may be--- from that moment on, in utter abandonment to the goodness and mercy of God for us. Sometimes this prayer is with words. At other times, it may be an inexpressible inner groaning or utterance from the heart. What's sure is that such prayer can't be rushed or be superficial. It doesn't need to be wordy or of a formal nature, either. It must be lifted up with a conscious, patient waiting on our part and an acknowledgement that God's time transcends our earthly space-time and that God's will, will be accomplished when God deems the appointed time has arrived.

A second exit strategy to save us from hostile forces or dangerous situations that we've allowed to persist for too long, is to repent! We can think of repenting of our sins as God spiritually lifting us up from of the ground, dusting us off, making sure we're not harmed, and enabling us to rely on him once more.

Repenting of our sins can also be thought of, as a refocussing of our gaze heavenward, and a remembering of the vastness of the cosmos and of the God who created it all, and still sees each human being as precious. Repenting of our sins too, enables a renewed consciousness of the powerful presence of God in every moment, of every day, and a confidence that God never abandons us, even if sometimes it may seem that way. When we repent of our sins, we leave behind our solitary life of choosing only what's in our selfish interest-at-the-time, in favor of a life of grace as part of a community of believers who commit to journeying with us every step of the way, helping us to avoid sinful situations in the first place, and helping us to fight off temptations

which might lead us further away from God's plan and purpose for our lives.

By choosing to lift up our eyes toward God, we also choose to leave fear behind, in favor of a courage to live for God with integrity of life and a renewed commitment to God's covenant.

This is the situation that Moses and the wandering Hebrew people had to face in the desert. They had grown impatient with God because they didn't have enough food and water to sustain them.

They felt despondent that they had no way out of the desert and that God was to blame for bringing them there, in the first place.

Rejecting God though, meant rejecting God's covenant with them, and such an action would mean that God would no longer protect

them in times of danger. They would be left to fend for

themselves---which is exactly what happens, when poisonous snakes kill many of the Jews in the wilderness.

Realizing their infidelity toward their covenanted God, acknowledging their pride in trying to dictate what God should or should not do for them, the Jews heartfully repent of their sins.

And the Lord, as a sign of his acceptance of their repentant hearts, asks Moses to create a bronze serpent set on a pole which would save those who were bitten from the poisonous snakes from death, after they would gaze upon it. Called the Neshkutan, the bronze serpent on a pole became, from then on, a symbol of salvation for the Jewish nation!

The Jews wouldn't be the only ones however, who would use a serpent-entwined rod as a symbol of healing power. In ancient Greece, the god, Asc-lep-ius, wielded a serpent-entwined rod to bring healing to his followers. And there is growing modern consensus among historians, that the rod of Asc-lep-ius may have had its origin in the story of Moses in the Bible! In fact, this same symbol of a serpent-entwined rod, is also used in modern

medicine today, and has come to be seen as a symbol of healing, worldwide.

Given this healing history, is it any wonder then, that Jesus refers to the bronze serpent-entwined rod created by Moses when considering his own life's purpose, and its meaning for the human race? As a Jew, Jesus undoubtedly marvelled at the healing and saving grace that God had granted to the repentant Jews through their looking upon the serpent-entwined rod. Now, Jesus sees his own impending death on the cross as bringing about an even greater saving event in the lives of believers! He proclaims, ***“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.”*** (John 3:14)

With these words, we can tell that Jesus sees his life and death as the bridge which reconciles God to the human race! He sees his life as a healing balm that restores what's broken, back to

wholeness once more. Jesus sees his life as the means whereby all persons who believe can be restored to right-relationship with God. What's more, he doesn't see his life to be that of a judge sent to condemn us either.

Far from it! Just two verses later, we hear in John 3: 17, Jesus say, ***“God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”***

'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.



There it is in black and white! God's not in the business of condemning! God's in the business of saving! God's in the business of restoring! God's in the business of reconciling! God's in the business of redeeming and justifying! God's in the business of healing and unifying!

Yet even though Jesus said it himself, there persists this little doubt sometimes, in some peoples' minds, that tells them they're not worthy of God's love; they're not deserving of God's healing; they're not capable of being saved! ---that they're miserable creatures deserving of punishment!

Whenever we listen to these lies, though, we're robbing the cross of its saving value! We're choosing to cast our eyes downward, rather than lifting our eyes heavenward and gazing upon our crucified Lord on the cross, who pours out his Most Precious Blood to save us! Just one single drop of that Precious Blood would have been enough, you know?! And yet, Jesus pours out

the whole of his life's blood as a testament to his great covenantal love for us! So, let us never waver in our belief in the saving death of Christ on the Cross! Let's continue to find strength and encouragement to live a life of faith by meditating on the Cross of Christ each day! Let us lift up our eyes to that cross whenever we're tempted to sin and receive grace to overcome it! And let us always affirm the saving power of Christ's death on the Cross for all who believe!