

SERMON – FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, March 10, 2024

Numbers 21:4-9, Psalm 107:1-2, 17-22

Ephesians 2:1-10, John 3:14-21

TO LOVE IS TO GROW

Come Holy Spirit, open our hearts to hear what needs to be heard, in
your Loving Name Lord Jesus. Amen

On this Fourth Sunday in Lent, dare I ask how we are all doing in our Lenten Discipline? Lent calls us to go into the Wilderness of our soul to once again find our true selves, to feel God's healing touch so that we can seek repentance for our wrongs, and ask for God's forgiveness. To be **Silent** is a great Lenten practice, and as we **abide in the silence** we learn to **Listen** and **Be Still to know God**. Howard Thurman in his book, *Meditations of the Heart*, says it so well. ***"Sometimes in the stillness of the quiet, if we listen, we can hear the whisper in the heart; giving strength to weakness, courage to fear, and hope to despair."*** It is in the Silence that we grow. Walking or Labyrinth or just sitting surrounded by nature, is a wonderful way to abide in silence, and if we can do either of these it's a start and I am sure it will be meaningful to us. Whether or not we give Lent 100% of our time, **we know that God Loves us**.

Speaking for myself, I usually start off with a bang and as we move along through the weeks, I find myself not being as focused as I would like to be. It really takes Discipline to do Lent the correct way, because like anything else in our life, it is what we put into something that will determine what we get out of it. How about you, are there others who feel this way too? I do hope there are some of us who can honor the Lenten Discipline all the way through the Season.

There is so much for us to learn from Scripture to help strengthen our relationship with God through Jesus, as we are assured of God's Love, Mercy and Grace, even when we mess up. As is usually the case, all the Readings build on each other to give us the BIG Story of God's Love, and this helps us to grow in our Faith. You just heard the Readings so have not had time to sit with them, so I invite you to let me share what I thought were some important points. I hope you will take the Bulletin home and re-read the Lessons, to see how they speak to you, because Scripture speaks to each of us differently.

Before I start my Message on the Readings for today, I would like to read this **Blessing Prayer from Bishop Deon**. Hopefully, it will allow us to hear what the Spirit is saying to each of us.

God Bless you with enough forgetfulness, to let go of the anchors of regret that weigh you down. God Bless you with enough forgiveness, to let go of the notion that you are not enough. God Bless you with enough faithlessness, to let go of belief in the falsehood of fear. God Bless you in the forgetting, the forgiving, and the faith-finding, that you fully love yourself as God loves the you you hide. Amen.

There are two important points to take away from today's Old Testament Reading. One is that the children of Israel were once again complaining to God about their circumstances; they were tired of everything God had given them, even though God brought them out of their bondage in Egypt where they suffered greatly under the Rule of Pharaoh. **Why is it that we humans are always complaining about something?** It started way back then and continues to this very day. I guess it is easier to complain than to be thankful for what we do have. At our last Beloved Group Meeting, Lana, our leader, gave us this saying which totally says it all about our complaining. **"Contentment is not the fulfillment of what we want, but the realization of how much we already have."** (repeat). Hopefully the next time we want to complain, we can give thanks instead.

The second important point is that while the Israelites were complaining, the Lord punished the people by sending poisonous serpents and many of the people died. They soon saw their error and went to Moses to admit that they had sinned against the Lord, and they asked Moses to pray to God to take away the serpents. The Lord told Moses to make a poisonous serpent out of bronze to set on a pole, and all those who had been bitten would look at it and be healed. Hold on to this important point, because it comes up again in the New Testament Lesson. We take from this Old Testament Scripture, that **God shows Love, Mercy and Grace to all of us as we realize our dependence on God for healing to take place.**

The Psalm allows us in verse 19, **"Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."** Do we ever cry out to God in our distress, if not, why not? I have no doubt that God can handle it. The psalms were written by people like you and me, they expressed their feelings in the moment to God. This psalm repeats the story of rebellion, punishment, repentance and healing, as we also heard in the Old Testament story, and probably things we may have experienced in our own lives. Whether or not God gives us what we want when we cry out in distress, we should never forget to do what verse 1 says, **"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures forever."**

In the Ephesian story we are assured that it is **"By Grace we have been saved through our faith, and this is not our own doing, it is the Gift of God."** We do not have to work for, or

seek favors with God, because God already loves us just as we are, but God does not want to leave us there, God wants us to grow in our relationship through Jesus. We do wrong, we seek repentance, God forgives, because God Loves us.

Then we hear this very familiar verse in John's Gospel, **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in God may not perish but have Eternal Life."** John 3:16 We all know this verse by heart, **but what is God really saying to us?**

God shows us what **True Love really** is about and that it is the base for a true relationship with God through Christ and with all God's Beloved Children. For us **to believe**, is to put our **trust and confidence in God**, and believing that only God can save us. God sets the pattern for **true love**, to give it freely to the point of self-sacrifice. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13:4, that **"Love is patient, Love is kind, Love never ends, Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things.** If only we can remember this when we have disagreements with each other.

And the epitome to all these stories is that **God gave his one and only Son to die on the Cross for our sins, and to offer us new life in his Resurrection, so that we no longer live in darkness.**

Along with all that, this is where the Old Testament story of Moses and his pole ties in with what God did for us. Moses did what God commanded him to do, to **lift up his pole** with the serpent so that the people could see it and be healed. This act is likened to how Jesus, The Son of Man, came to save us by dying on the Cross which is the source of our salvation and captures the difference between death and life. Our healing comes through whatever hurt, suffering or pain we may be going through, **because Jesus was raised up so that we too may be healed.**

It is no accident that these Scripture readings on how God intends for all of us to be healed, happens to be the same Sunday that we have our Healing Service. I hope this resonates with us, because it is through God's Love, Mercy and Grace that God wants healing for us. As part of our Lenten Discipline, I invite us to look within ourselves to whatever may be burning within each of us that needs to be healed. It is good to bring these to the Altar so that we can be Anointed and receive the Laying on of Hands by one of our Prayer Ministers.

I would like to remind you that we have Prayer Ministers, who can be identified by our special name tags; we are willing to pray with anyone who might need prayer from time to

time. God called us to this Ministry, and the Holy Spirit leads us in prayer; we would very much like to help you through whatever difficulty may be happening in our lives. There is also a Prayer Box out in the front by the entrance door, to put your prayer requests in and someone will pray for you.

My friends, hopefully the Message today will give us new light to shine on our spiritual journey, and if we can learn to just sit in silent reflection for only a few minutes each day, then this is the start of our discipline in our journey with God.

It will give meaning to the next two weeks in Lent, as we move into Palm Sunday and Holy Week, to kneel at the Cross, and arrive at the empty tomb.

We can do it, as we take this journey together to make a difference in our life. All that we do here in Worship each Sunday and beyond, enables us to Grow in Christ's Love, and it is through this **Love** that we can all join our Vestry in contributing our gifts to make 'Trinity Grow.' **It is through Love that we Grow.**

In closing I would like to read something by Howard Thurman again, from his book, *The Disinherited*.

“There is something so big and vast about God as Creator and Sustainer of all Life, that it is hard for me to feel that I am included. And yet, God is with us. We are included. With tenderness and beauty, God wants to cleanse us, to heal us and rest with us in silent unity. Like the leper we are in need of God’s Healing Touch, to be renewed. We trust and believe. We come to God, centering with the sacred space together.”

May we be Blessed with a meaningful Lent and Holy Week as we welcome a Joyful Easter.

Amen.