

“... 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.”

Are you in *need* of healing? Are you in *search* of healing? Perhaps you *have* been healed. Perhaps you have been healed by the skill of a surgeon or through the prayers and ministry of a holy man or woman of God. Sunday by Sunday people are prayed for by name before the altar of God in churches throughout the world. Sometimes those prayed for are totally unaware of these prayers - sometimes they know and are greatly comforted by such remembrance before God.

But *we all* need healing - in fact that is why we are here why you are here - even if the thought has never occurred to you. We who understand who we are through God's revealed word know well that **we are creatures of the Fall** and that we can say with St Paul that “... the good we would we do not and the evil that we would not, we do...”

We know how easy it is to succumb to bitterness and jealousy... to desire the downfall of another whom we find to be obstructing our plans or who has caused pain or offence... We know how easy it is to pass on negative or hurtful gossip or unkindness about another... because we have no love for the brother or sister concerned... and sometimes **we fall into despair**, and are filled not only with hatred for others but that we also succumb to self-loathing - hatred of ourselves.

So you see, we do need healing. And we need to be saved not only from others who have the capacity to deeply wound us but also at times, **we need to be saved from ourselves.**

Today's Gospel alludes to that wonderful story from the Book of Numbers, chapter 21 when the Israelites again got discouraged, and **in their unbelief** they murmured against Moses and against Yahweh God for bringing them into the wilderness.

They had already forgotten that it was their own sin that caused them to be there, and they tried to blame Moses for it. As a judgment against the people for their sinfulness, God sent poisonous serpents into the camp, and people began to die. In this ancient story, God's people were learning that **they themselves** were the problem and NOT Moses or Yahweh.

And so they came to Moses to confess that sin and ask for God's mercy. When Moses prayed for the people, God instructed him to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole so the people could be healed...

"... the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

This story from the Exodus reminded the Israelites and indeed has come to remind the **whole people of God** through the centuries that their God is a God of mercy and is a God who heals the penitent and those who turn to him **as they are** to seek his mercy and his love.

And in today's gospel that simple and ancient story from the journey of God's people to the Promised Land is given a new and more profound message - "Just as Moses lifted up the

serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

In the Sunday Gospels of our Lenten journey, we see Jesus setting his face turning toward Jerusalem and becoming focused on being **the** teacher “...of the Way” for as Jesus said In the Gospel of the First Sunday in Lent - “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.”

And in the Second Sunday in Lent immediately following that strangely intimate yet glorious mystery that is the Transfiguration Jesus ordered Peter James and John “...to tell no-one about what they had seen, until after the Son of man had risen from the dead.”

And last Sunday, the Third Sunday in Lent, when Jesus upturned the money tables and drove the old order out of the Temple of God, the Jews asked, “ What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them by alluding to his death, saying - “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” And of course he was speaking of the temple of his body and not only of its physical death for he was pre-figuring the Mystery of the Resurrection.

But the Jews mostly did not comprehend - although as stated in the Gospel “...many (also) believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing.” But the Gospel also reminds us that Jesus did not entrust himself to them - “for He himself knew what was in the heart of man...”

And here today on this Fourth Sunday in Lent, in his conversation with Nicodemus who fearfully came to Jesus in secret, Jesus explains the healing power of the Son of man by alluding to Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness so that the Israelites might look up and live - but something greater than Moses is here for it will be the Son of man who is lifted up and those who look upon him will also be saved from death - eternal death.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem as his great act of healing for humankind would take place when he was lifted up - for only that act of total self-giving would be sufficient to heal and save this world from destruction.

“For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

And it is in entering the Light that we are healed and that we are saved.

Christ lifted up on the Cross is **THE** great healing work of God and his work of salvation. And that is why you are gathered here at the Table of the Lord and why it is graced by the Cross of Christ... It is why the Cross was marked on your forehead when you were baptized... it is why you make the sign of the Cross when you pray (and if you don't, you should ask yourself why?)

The fact is that it is only through the suffering and death of the Son of man that the healing and saving power of God could be released for fallen humanity - and just as we come to the Cross on Good Friday to acknowledge God's love outpoured for us and to humbly claim it for ourselves - it is the way to God in Christ.

Claim God's healing power and love this Lent that you may be released from the bondage of self, of sin and death. It is your choice.

AMEN

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