

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Hymns: 347, 368, 271, 54, 295, 437.

Introit: Psalm 107:1-9.

P Give thanks to the LORD! For He is good.
C **For His mercy endures for ever.**
P Let the people whom the LORD has redeemed proclaim that
C **He has redeemed them from the hand of the oppressor,**
P and has gathered them from the other lands, from the east and from the west,
C **from the north and from the south!**
P They wandered around the desolate wilderness
C **without finding a city where they could live.**
P They were hungry and thirsty.
C **Their souls grew faint inside them.**
P When they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
C **He used to deliver them from their afflictions.**
P He led them on a straight road
C **that they might go to a city where they could live.**
P Let them give thanks to the LORD for His mercy,
C **and for His wonderful deeds to the descendants of Adam!**
P For He satisfied their withered souls
All: and filled their hungry souls with good things.

Collect: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment, You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Old Testament: Numbers 21:4-9.

Epistle: Ephesians 2:1-10.

Gospel: John 3:14-21.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, John 3:14-21 .

14 As Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world may be saved through Him. 18 The person who believes in Him is not condemned, but the person who does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of God's only Son. 19 This is the verdict, that the Light has come into the world, but people have loved darkness rather than the Light, because they have been doing evil. 20 For everyone who does wrong hates the Light and does not come to the Light, in order that his deeds may not be exposed. 21 However, he who practises the truth comes to the Light, that his deeds may be plainly seen to have been done in God."

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

A few moments ago we each confessed our faith, in the words of the Nicene Creed, in "**the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God...Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven...And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate**". As you know to be crucified was to be nailed to a large cross and hoisted in the air and left to die an excruciatingly painful death. This was the Roman method of execution. Anyone who was crucified was lifted up on a cross to die in a public spectacle

as a warning to others who might be thinking of going against the Empire. This is what was ahead of our Lord, but at the time of our text, His time had not yet come.

But the time that He had left He used for teaching, take Nicodemus for instance, he was a member of the Pharisees and a secret follower of Jesus. - Nicodemus knew the Scriptures, but he didn't understand them. - He was unable to see that the Scriptures have their fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ, the long-promised Messiah. He wanted to understand, but he had a large mental block: rabbinic Judaism. To the Jews at the time of Jesus's coming down to earth, the Scriptures were little more than a set of laws. Consequently, Nicodemus couldn't understand the necessity to be born again, he tried to comprehend this in a physical sense, as if a grown man could re-enter his mother's womb.

But in the verses preceding our text, Christ catechizes him on the necessity of being born of water and of the Spirit, to believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and to become baptized in and into His saving Name, even as "*All newborn soldiers of the Crucified Bear on their brows the seal of Him who died*" [LSB 837.] the seal placed on us at our Baptism, the means by which the Holy Spirit came down and entered our hearts, creating and sustaining in us saving faith in Christ. By faith produced through Holy Baptism are we born of water and of the Spirit.

In this Sacrament the Old Adam is brought down in the holy water to the point that it drowns and dies. - This baptismal drowning must take place each day in the confession of sins. - This means that we must daily confess of our sins, *for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but God's temporal and eternal punishment, for all our sins and iniquities have ever offended Him.* [Luther's small Catechism.] We have sinned against Him in thought, word, and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We don't fear, love, and trust in God above all things, but we give in to the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God's Name nor let His kingdom come nor let His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We have set ourselves up against the God who came down from heaven.

We have lifted ourselves up in our sinful pride, even as the Israelites lifted themselves up in their own eyes, and in so doing sinned against the Lord and against Moses, and they were bitten by fiery serpents, just as Adam and Eve were spiritually bitten by the great fiery serpent that is the devil himself. The Lord brought down Adam and Eve by putting them out of the Garden of Eden. He cast down the Israelites with the serpents bites. He beats us down with the preaching of His Law, because we're no different than they were, we too are full of sinful pride. **However, God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love for us, also made us, even when we were dead in trespasses, alive with Christ. It is by grace that you have been saved.** (Ephesians 2:4-5.)

As Paul says in our Epistle, "**dead in trespasses**" and, as Christ says in our text, "**the person who does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of God's only Son. This is the verdict, that the Light has come into the world, but people have loved darkness rather than the Light, because they have been doing evil. For everyone who does wrong hates the Light and does not come to the Light, in order that his deeds may not be exposed. However, he who practises the truth comes to the Light, that his deeds may be plainly seen to have been done in God.**"

And when Christ, the Light of the world, comes again on the Last Day, as we confess in the Athanasian Creed, "*all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give an account of their works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved*"

"The LORD told Moses: "Make a fiery snake and put it on a pole! Anyone who has been bitten should look at it! Then he will live." (Numbers 21:8.). - The Israelites who were bitten and looked up to the serpent on the pole were saved. The Israelites confessed their sins and placed their trust in the word the Lord gave Moses, the word to erect the serpent on the pole. They were brought down in their sins, and the Lord lifted them up in His grace. Jesus said **As Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.**" In order that Christ would be lifted up, He had to come down from heaven and hid His glory in human form, **For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have**

eternal life. For God has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world may be saved through Him. (vv. 16-17).

Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in order that He would be lifted up on the cross to die for the forgiveness of our sins. His dead, lifeless body was taken down from the cross to be laid in the tomb, in order that He would take it back up again by rising from the dead. Christ our Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us His sheep to take it up again.

No one takes it from Him, but He volunteered to do it. He alone has power to lay it down and to take it back up again, and He has done it for us, the lowly in heart, He has lifted up you and me, the lowly. His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation, even to this present generation, to you and I.

"God...is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He has loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, has made us alive together with Christ by grace we have been saved, and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus"

Until the Day when we'll be seated in the heavenly places, our Lord brings the heavenly places down to earth, that we would be with Him as He comes to us in His Word and Sacraments. - He comes to us in Baptism not only to bring down the Old Adam in us, but to lift up the new man each day, to daily emerge and arise, that we would live before God in righteousness and purity forever. He lifts us up each day in the forgiveness of sins—the daily living of our Baptism as we bear on our brows the seal of Him who died, for we are marked with the sign of the cross to mark us as redeemed by Christ the crucified. As the baptized children of God, we have the privilege of lifting up one another in prayer, praying for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs, and lifting up one another through prayer, hymns, and psalms.

Our Lord brings the heavenly places down to earth, down to us with the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven as He comes to us in His Supper, as the cup is lifted up, lifted up so that we would taste and see that the Lord is good and that we would be lifted up to receive the foretaste of the Feast to come and to catch a glimpse of the heavenly places, heaven and earth are full of His glory right here at His Table.

Until that Day when we are lifted up into the heavenly places for all eternity, we need not fear what the devil, the world, and our sinful nature throw in our way, "For," as the Psalmist says in our Introit, **“Give thanks to the LORD! For He is good. For His mercy endures for ever. Let the people whom the LORD has redeemed proclaim that He has redeemed them from the hand of the oppressor,”** God grant this in Jesus' Name and for His sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
Amen.

3rd HYMN: 271,

Prayer of the Church Fourth Sunday in Lent

P As forgiven sinners granted faith to believe that the Son of Man was lifted up for us, let us lift our prayers to God who gave His only begotten Son that we should not perish but have eternal life.

Brief Silence.

P For repentance and faith, that we who become impatient with God when He does not act according to our will, as Israel did; may acknowledge our sin, look to His Son on the cross, and live.... Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P For lives that are pleasing to our Saviour, that we, who were dead in our trespasses and sins but have now been made alive in Christ Jesus, would walk in the good works that God prepared in advance for us.....

Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P For strength to fight temptation, that we, whose sinful natures still wish to carry out the desires of the flesh, may be renewed in baptismal life and so live not as children of wrath but as forgiven saints who have been raised with Christ..... Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P For those who proclaim that God sent His Son not to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through Him, that the Holy Spirit would give His joy, peace, and zeal to all pastors, missionaries, and church workers, and that God's Word may be preached freely and bear fruit in our lives and in the lives of all who hear it..... Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P For those who govern in every community and country, that the Lord who at the Red Sea showed His power over earthly tyranny, would still today rescue all who are oppressed and place into office civil leaders who are just, wise, and caring..... Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P For those who lack food, homes, jobs, or the necessities of life, that the God whose Son fed 5000 hungry people would also provide for their needs and that He would grant to us compassionate hearts that reach out to help everyone in need..... Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P For those who are hospitalized, recovering from surgery, facing chronic pain or long-term health problems, and all who suffer as a result of living in a fallen world [*especially*

] that God would grant mercy and perseverance, as well as

healing according to His good and gracious will, Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer..

P For those who come to the Table of the Lord this day, that He who fed the 5000 would feed us with His body and blood and that we may know that the promised Prophet comes to us with His forgiveness and life, Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P For each of us and for all of God's baptized people whose faith is daily challenged, that we, like the first Christians, may devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers, and that we might live each day with the assurance that God's mercy has been shown to us, Lord, in Your mercy:

C hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 54,