

Promised Presence – Persevering & Enduring”

3 Lent B March 14, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

Numbers 21:4-9

Though God provides food & water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine & grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.

⁴From Mount Hor the Israelites set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” ⁶Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people, ⁸And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Gospel: John 3:14-21

To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader, Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today’s first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.

[Jesus said:] ¹⁴“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son-of-Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶For God loved the world in this way, that God gave the Son, the only begotten one, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷“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. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so their deeds may

not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

The Israelites make it out from under the thumb of Egyptian slavery only to encounter the harsh realities of life in the wilderness. When they complain spewing venom at God, they are bitten by snakes filled with venom and begin dying. Moses is told to fashion a bronze serpent on a pole and raise it up for people to see and as they do so they will live. As they follow God, God provides a way to be saved even when the people are spewing their complaining venom. Jesus becomes this universal symbol that is raised on a large stick for all the people to see and find healing. Turning to Jesus is where we find life for all that poisons our world. Jesus and God both had to endure the path also in order to bring this healing to us. Jesus endured to death and God persevered in providing God's only son. Their enduring and persevering promised presence allows us to not only lean into the sight of hope on a Cross but also to endure the personal trials of our own right now.

Some principles for Life (Living in Faith Everyday)

- A) Name a current 'Trial''Poisoning' that has bitten your heart...esp. one you complain about under your breath or in prayer. Is it Chronic, Transient, or Incidental? Is this a result of 'part of life'(e.g. aging), mistake you made, circumstances beyond your control, ongoing unresolvable problem, relational or cultural/values issue?
- B) What has become your attitude toward this situation? Is it helping or making the situation worse? Honestly, what if anything have you done to contribute to where you're at? Would others describe your stance toward this topic as blaming, bucking-up, backing away, bending backwards, buckled in prayer, etc. ?
- C) God always desires to provide a way though/out of these situations. A raised bronze serpent, a savior on a cross, a treatment, a source of insight/wisdom, a new understanding, an untried experience, a different treatment plan, changing our attitude/understanding, etc.. Do you see God in the progress that you have made or options available to you even when they don't work for you specifically?
- D) How do you turn to God directly? Some folks say things like, "give it to God." How does that work specifically for you? How do you explain that "giving it" process to say your grandchild or neighbor who wants to learn how to do that? How do you experience God walking with you through your situation?....the support you receive from community/friends/family?....the treatment plans, medicine, medical procedures, counseling/therapy offered?

E) Persevering/Enduring are certainly qualities God is familiar with as God watches/engages/walks with us/creation through time. What resources/methods do you call on to persevere? How specifically do they help you? What would you say to others who are enduring something and looking to find strength to get through it?

Some suggestions to Endure/Persevere:

- i. **Prevention:** Get yourself strong, ready, healthy, balanced to be ready to meet the challenges when they come along. Focus on those areas that need strengthening the most for you – is it: emotional, relational, integrity/self-respect, identity, competency, physical, parenting, listening, dealing w/ negative emotions or outlook.
- ii. **Increase your ability to face and move into risk.** Increasing steps here allow us to get in touch with the internal resources and strength that has always latently been part of us.
- iii. **Increase your ability to face failure.** It's happened before – examine how you got through it. What worked, what didn't? What did you learn about yourself that you can employ now? Facing failure & having it become a natural part of what happens begins to take the sting out of it & helps it become a bittersweet friend in clothing we don't like but a presence that can help. Learn the truth that often getting thru failure births hope.
- iv. **Identify your support** triggers and system. Who do you need to call, be with, hear from. What kind/type of guidance/conversation do you need or benefit from? What style of coaching works for you – kick in the butt, encouraging/nurturing, Drill Instructor, etc.? Where do you get your nurturing energy from? Where do you get your “get on out there and try it” energy from?
- v. **Learn how to manage your emotions/interpretations.** Emotions just are, yet they are shaped by how we see/experience/interpret the world. Learn to experience them and understand when you can let them be the wave that carries you and is “processed/digested” and when you need to put them metaphorically in a jar & return to them later. Emotions feed motivation (both positive & negative – and frequently cause you to make ungrounded decisions); better decisions are made in your executive function part of your brain.....learn how to value your emotions along with other inputs and consider them AS you maintain control of your decision-making in your brain.

vi. **Understand your ability to do any and all of i-v are a reflection of God's presence** and promise helping you to endure & persevere exactly as Jesus did on the way to the cross.

Upcoming:

3.21 Promised Presence: Hope Seeds that Break Hearts

3.28 Promised Presence: From Waving Palm Branches to Hanging on a Tree Branch