

# Bible Study: Lent 4 (B) – March 14, 2021

## **Numbers 21:4-9**

The wilderness accounts of the Exodus are filled with honest narratives of the Israelites complaining to Moses because they are wandering around, discontent, scared, or even worried they have made the wrong decision. In this story, it seems the Israelites are a bit hangry! Despite being saved from a life in captivity, they are unhappy with the quantity and quality of their food and want to make sure not only Moses, but God knows this as well. God's response may seem unlikely—God sends snakes that kill—but the response reminds the Israelites that God has not abandoned them. Instead, they must trust in God to ensure they live. The Israelites realize their error and God reverses the punishment by using the same animal, now as a statue, to bring life out of death for the Israelites.

- As humans, we may become restless and even become complainers or blamers. Have you ever complained to or blamed God? How did it feel?
- Where is your wilderness?

## **Psalms 107:1-3, 17-22**

Like the complainers in the reading from Numbers, the “fools” of Psalm 107 are also redeemed by God. The Psalm and reading illustrate the love and desire God has for a relationship with God's people. Spanning all directions of the land, the Psalmist illustrates the reality that no complaining, rebellion, or wandering can separate the people from God's desire for them. God's mercy and love even saved the people from death. The Psalm varies from the Numbers reading and the Gospel because it begins and concludes with the responsibility of the redeemed children not only to offer their appreciation of God's mercy but also to share God's wondrous acts with the rest of the world.

- How do you respond to God's mercy in your life?

## **Ephesians 2:1-10**

The author of Ephesians eloquently paints a picture of death and renewal in this passage. Before there was death, but now, through Christ, there is life. Before “we were by nature children of wrath,” but now we are seated in the heavenly places with God's own son. All of this is accomplished through God's grace, not out of any human work. This passage is often quoted to emphasize that humans do nothing to earn God's love

or grace, yet at the end of the passage the author states that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works.”

There is nothing that humans do to earn God’s love, grace or mercy, but that does not mean that good works are irrelevant. It is a matter of order. First and primary is our identity in Christ Jesus. Second, stemming from our identity is the way of life that God has prepared for us. The reason that Christians do good works is not in order to earn God’s love or mercy but rather in response to God’s action. Our good works are not in pursuit of a reward, for we have already received the immeasurable riches of God’s grace.

- What does it mean to you to be a recipient of God’s grace?
- Identities such as parent, child, spouse, employee or employer come with certain duties. How does your identity in Christ bring new or different duties?
- Though our identity as Christians has shifted from death to life, that hardly means Christians are now perfected. In what ways do you recognize a movement from pursuing “the desires of flesh and senses” to the way of life that God has prepared?

### **John 3:14-21**

The Gospel reading shares the last part of a conversation with a Pharisee, Nicodemus. Just a few verses earlier, Nicodemus arrived in the darkness of the night to question the divinity of Jesus and to understand Jesus’ relationship to God. Through his monologue, Jesus is bringing Nicodemus out of his confusion and darkness into the light that is seeing God in Christ. We don’t hear about Nicodemus in our reading because Christ’s light has overtaken the scene, and just like the serpent in the allusion to the Numbers reading, the light of Christ brings new life through death. A death, because God’s love and desire for the world is so immense, that God joined humanity by sending the Son so that the world might come to know God through Christ. We have been redeemed and given a new life in Christ and through this our lives have been forever enlightened. This is the crux of our Christian identity.

- John 3:16 has become almost the slogan of the Christian faith, but what does it mean to you? How do you understand eternal life in Christ?
- Where is the light of Christ shining in your life?