



Fourth Week of Lent

March 22 through March 28, 2009

Journeying Through Lent A Time to be Taught by Jesus

Use this resource alone or with others. Used with others, read the reflections aloud, pausing between them. Invite each member of the group to take a turn reading, or prepare readers in advance for larger groups. Share with each other your Lenten commitments and promises, keeping within the silence of your own heart those things which belong only there.

Opening Ritual and Prayer

Light a candle. Open your Bible and set it beside the lit candle. Prepare the room for prayer, even if you are alone. Quiet music can help you settle yourself and others after a hectic day.

Leader: God of light be our beacon in the darkness.

All: Enlighten us O God.

Leader: Jesus, you who are the light of the world, help us to walk in your light.

All: Enlighten us O Lord

Leader: May we all live as sons and daughters of the light

All: Amen.

Read aloud yourself or have various members of the group read aloud the Scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday of Lent (Year B):

2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

Ephesians 2:4-10

John 3:14-21

Reflection

Lent is a time to be taught by Jesus.

Encountering this Sunday's Gospel is like trying to take a drink from a fire hose. It is filled with a variety of images that come at us with the power of the water pressure in a fire hose. This is typical of John's Gospel. The Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Lent consists of a powerful flow of symbols: a serpent that is held up, eternal life, believing and light. This is quite a bit to swallow all at once.

We begin with the character Nicodemus, a learned Pharisee. He belonged to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious supreme court of the time. He leaves his house one night under the veil of darkness to covertly meet and talk with a rural carpenter/rabbi Jesus of Nazareth from Galilee. This is astonishing. It would be like a justice of the United States Supreme Court surreptitiously slipping out at night to talk to a street corner preacher in Washington, D.C.

Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of darkness because he didn't want to be known publicly as a follower of Jesus. He was still uncommitted. Sometimes we act the same way--hiding in the shadows, hiding our doubts and weak faith from others. But we are called to live in the light and let others see our deeds so that God's glory is revealed in our lives. We are called to be courageous about our faith, to be more public about our commitment to it.

In the Gospel passage Jesus, the itinerant Galilean rabbi, is teaching the learned Nicodemus about what Moses did. The author of the Gospel of John is making use of a favorite technique here, that of double meaning. It is found in the expression "lifted up." It has the obvious physical meaning of placing something up high like a crane lifts objects up at a skyscraper construction site. It also has the meaning that something or someone is highly elevated so as to be seen by people, like a flag in a parade.

Jesus reminds Nicodemus that Moses lifted a bronze serpent up high (Numbers 21). All the Israelites that looked at it were saved from the bites of poisonous snakes. In the Gospel of John, Jesus will be lifted up high on the cross to be seen by all. All who look upon the crucified Jesus and believe in him will be saved. Ironically two instruments of death, a snake and a cross, are presented here as a means of remaining alive. In the case of the cross, it is a means to eternal life.

Ask Yourself

Of all the teachings of Jesus, which ones are closest to your heart?

Jesus continues to teach Nicodemus and in so doing also teaches us. He tells him that "...God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him might not perish, but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). Many of us have seen signs held by fans in sporting arenas and stadiums with the words "John 3:16." For some

unexplained reason, television cameras seem to zoom in on these signs. Yet how many of the fans know the deep meaning of this text which Martin Luther called “the Gospel in miniature?” The real meaning of the text revolves around “believing,” a verb that appears five times in the passage.

What then are we suppose to believe? We are called to believe that God did not just love *part* of the world but the *whole* world. Even though we suffer, even though we hurt, even though the world is loused up, and innocent people die, God did not condemn the world but loved it. God loved and continues to love it the very same way a parent loves a child and so God shared his Son with everyone and this love knows no bounds.

Ask Yourself

We are called to love others completely, just as God loves us. During this Lent, to whom will you turn your heart in love? With whom will you make up for past offenses?

The two words “believe” and “light” occur five times in this Gospel passage. The two words are related. God sends the light of his life to us. The light who is Jesus extinguishes the darkness and enables us to see; in John’s Gospel, seeing is believing. Our coming to the light to see and believe is expressed in the final sentence of the Gospel reading: “But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.” God’s work done in us is this: to die to self so that we can be raised to new life. Our good works—doing our daily tasks with love and care and acting justly and charitably are our way of being “lifted up.” Finally, the gateway to eternal life is the embracing of our own cross daily so that all who see us raised up will have revealed to them Christ the light of the world.

Reflection Questions

- ✚ When have I experienced God’s great love for me?
- ✚ Do I understand that God’s love is universal? What actions can I perform and what relationships can I develop to share God’s universal love?
- ✚ While holding a crucifix, the symbol of Christ being lifted up, ask yourself what you believe about Jesus.

Activities for this week of Lent

For Individuals and all family members

Go outside at night when there is a cloudless sky and look up at the stars. Ponder how these tiny points of light witness to the light of God all through the night. Share with one another if you are in a group how God lights up your life.

For Children

At dinner time each day this week trace a cross on the forehead of your parents and have them trace one on your forehead. When this is completed go around the table and ask each person to share what this action meant to them.

Closing Prayer

Leader: O Lord, dispel the darkness of our minds and be the light that shines in the hearts of your people. Let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: That you God may lead us to Christ, the Light of the world. Let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: God, heal us and preserve us from the skepticism of this world. Let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord hear our prayer

Leader: Jesus, you who take away the sins of the world, free us from the contagious power of evil. Let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: that all of us, by the example of our lives, may become in Christ the light of the word. Let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord hear our prayer

Exchange a greeting of peace with all who are present.