

March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Year B; 4th Sunday in Lent

Numbers 21: 4-9

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

Ephesians 2: 1-10

John 4: 14-21

**“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”**

**Our garage is attached to our house, and thus there is a door to the garage in our kitchen. It is a convenient setup and Tim has put our recycling containers right out that kitchen door, on the landing to the 3 stairs that lead down into the garage.**

**Convenient yes, unless it was the day a few summers ago when Tim opened the kitchen door to the garage and there was a black snake sitting right there, enjoying the cool of the garage in the heat of that summer day.**

**Tim slammed the door and went around and outside and back in the garage and encouraged the black snake to go outside again.....**

**Now that’s only happened once, and yes, I KNOW black snakes are grand and eat the mice and other varmints, and they have promised they will not bite me....but still now...ever since that summer day.....EVERY time I open the kitchen door to the garage I check and see if there is a snake there.**

**Snakes are powerful creatures for us and hard to forget, so I guess God was sick of hearing the Israelites complain and thus sent those snakes, those memorable snakes to make God’s point about our blessing-forgetting, self - involved.....so-whiny, so-human selves.**

Now I worship the God of love, I know my Savior as the prince of peace...so I am not going to spend a lot of time worrying about God getting fed up and sending snakes to bite and kill God's people....but I can hear in this memorable Old Testament lesson...

I hear us, yes OUR blessing-forgetting, only noticing the bad and ignoring the glory of God all around us...disregarding the warm food at hand and the roof over my head when the cold winds blow again....

Yes.....our whiny oh so human selves...We are all Israelites in the wilderness quite more often than we care to admit...

And we are also quite often in our lives..... Nicodemus.....

In our Gospel lesson today, we come upon a conversation that has been going on for quite a while.....so we need to catch up to have any idea what is going on.

First, the one we are often so like...Nicodemus...He is the one Jesus is talking to....He was a Pharisee a teacher of the law, very well respected in the community.....

He has heard of Jesus and is curious, very curious....really almost drawn to Jesus...wants to learn more.....to meet this man....who teaches and preaches and heals and all so filled with light....filled with the light...

But Nicodemus, the one we are so often like.....Nicodemus does not want to risk anything to meet Jesus...does not want to risk his position in society, his comfortable life, the pleasure of being respected and listened to....

So he goes to see Jesus....but he just waits until the middle of the night to do it...after everyone is asleep.....so not having to risk that anyone will see him....

And Jesus receives him and welcomes him and they talk for quite a long time....

When we join the conversation questions have been asked, Jesus has replied and explained, they have debated and jostled a bit with words.....

And as we join the conversation Jesus is making a reference to the days of Moses...when yes, those Israelites were complaining, and those snakes were biting....

And God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and the people, after complaining and being snake-bit....they should look up to the serpent and that they would not die but be healed...

And Jesus speaks to Nicodemus...to Nicodemus...to us...sneaking in under cover of darkness....wanting to ask but not willing to risk anything....Jesus tells us...." ....so must the son of Man be lifted up..."

Foreshadowing the cross and speaking of God's love for this world for Nicodemus for you and for me...."For God so loved the world....so, so loved so so.....loves us..."

So Nicodemus has this extraordinary late night talk with Jesus...and then he returns home...and and.....and...

And he goes right back to living as he had....learned, respected, comfortable....nothing changed....nothing....changed?....Well, maybe not externally, but inside....something did linger...

The conversation with Jesus, with God's only Son....stayed with Nicodemus....stayed for years...like all of our faith journeys....it takes years....not accomplished in an instant....done and accomplished and checked off in an instant....but a journey walked and pondered and lived...one step at a time...

So three years later.....We see Nicodemus again....the only other time he appears in the gospels....Jesus has been lifted up on that cross and has died....and as the late afternoon sun casts long shadows on Golgotha....Here again is Nicodemus....offering to help...

His fellow Pharisee and teacher....his fellow highly respected friend, Joseph of Arimathea, has found his courage and gone to Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus...so that his body can be buried with dignity.....and Nicodemus says what can I do??

And so Nicodemus brings the spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial....he could not do everything he could not do many things.....

But he could do something....and in a time of fear....and a frenzy of whispers of who might be arrested next...

Nicodemus steps forward and brings the spices....in the late afternoon sunlight...not by darkness of night...but in the light....

And not just a few but 100 pounds of spices....way more than needed for a single body...

But wanting to offer an extravagance.....to offer what he could and more, much more, to the one lifted up, to whom he could look up to and know that God so loved....that God so loves.... so loves our snake-bitten....grumbling...under cover of darkness selves...God so loves so loves.....always.....

Amen.

The Reverend Megan Limburg