

Fourth Sunday in Lent
Year B

Numbers 21:4-9
Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
Ephesians 2:1-9
John 3:14-21

The Gospel reading today contains one of the most Bible recognized verses in the American culture. But, to really understand what Jesus is saying in this oft quoted verse, we must look at the verses which precede it in this chapter, as well as study the Hebrew Scriptures.

We know that Nicodemus was a leader of the Jewish people, but was curious about this man he had heard so much about. Fearing his colleagues on the Sanhedrin, the legislative council of the Jews, Nicodemus approached Jesus at night, in the dark. From his response to Jesus, it is clear that Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus' meaning, since he went immediately into the aspect of reentering the mother's womb. However, Jesus continues to try to explain His meaning by quoting the passage from Numbers which we heard today and equating that with His own crucifixion. Thus, in Jesus' words, we see salvation as rebirth as children of God through water and the Spirit. Through Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection, He is revealed as the revelation of God.

Jesus then utters the famous line about love - "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." Nowhere in this statement does God exclude anyone. All are to be granted eternal life IF they choose to believe. The word "world" is from the Greek word "kosmos", which we know as the universe. This tells us all we need to know about the scope of God's plan - everyone, all creation is to have eternal life. It is only those who reject God by dwelling in darkness who exclude themselves.

For us, this gives the direction our ministries should take. We are to be open to all people who come to us, whatever their need, their condition, or any other characteristic we might want to include. "... The Son did not come into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." As the Apostle Paul states it, "There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus." It is only humans that want to condemn those who are different. God wants us to love everyone.

One of the things I am grateful for with you is I have never seen any condemnation in your interactions with people who come to us - on Sundays or Wednesdays. You are open and accepting of all. That is what we are called to do, but something many Christians forget. Being born of the Spirit, we show love to anyone who walks through our doors, just as Jesus would. Let us always remember this love, which is a reflection of God's love for us.