

**Prayer of the Day:**

Almighty God, we confess that we deserve to be punished for our evil deeds. But we ask you graciously to cleanse us from all sin and to comfort us with your salvation; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen!

**Verse of the Day:**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

**Sermon Text:**

This morning/evening I want you to imagine something that is incredibly frustrating to you. It could be an item or an individual which for whatever particular reason you have lost the ability to consider with any fondness or sympathy.

I know, I know, we are supposed to love all of God's

on point, is that as sinful human beings well, these people or things exist. Got it in mind. Okay now let's take that mental picture and place it on your desk at work. Let's hang it on the refrigerator at home. Let's hang them from every light pole all over town and then measure what that does to our level of frustration. Let's see how it affects our psychological well-being. My guess, you will either learn to deal you're your feelings for that person or thing or suffer a complete and total mental break. Ready to experiment? Of course not! Sounds terrible.

Now let's make our way back to that Old Testament Lesson. As we find Israel in Numbers 21 they are not in the midst of a very good chapter in their history. We are told in the verse leading up to our lesson today that Aaron died on Mount Hor, entering his eternal rest in heaven but unable to see the Promised Land as a result of his sin. Edom refused Israel passage through their territory forcing them to take the longer route around and then they are attacked by and must destroy Arad, starting the long blood feud between them and the Canaanites. Moses tells us the people grew "impatient" and they began to complain. I guess it is understandable although unjustifiable.

In their discontent we are told they grumble not about Edom or Canaan but against God. The word "miserable" in Hebrew points out that someone has been slighted or not given what is owed to them. Israel feels God is somehow slighting them, that He isn't giving them their due.

The solution? The Lord unleashes the first dose of the cure for such a situation. Venomous snakes intensify the suffering of the people of Israel in order to knock them out of their own indulgent behavior that they might realize the real cause for all of this. This is another use of the sufferings of this world. We have spoken of God's ability to strengthen us in hardship but He can also use suffering to wake us up so that we start looking at things as they really are.

Thankfully, in desperation, Israel realizes the error of their ways and cries out to God for help. In their suffering, they acknowledge their sin and run to Moses who prays for them. God offers a solution to the snakes but it's not what we would expect. He could just take them away but instead, *"Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live."* What? What a strange solution right? Look to the very thing that is killing you for life.

**Text: Numbers 21:4-9**

<sup>4</sup> They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; <sup>5</sup> they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup> The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

There are so many lessons here for us. Let's go back to the frustration from before. Living in a sinful world there will always be things that frustrate us. But what we choose to do with that is always telling. I'm also willing to bet that if we look hard enough at our mental pictures, we'll begin to see what perhaps truly nags at us. It's sin. Sure, there is the sin of others that's always easy for us to see, point out, and even fixate on. But what about me? Is it perhaps my selfishness that plays into my frustration because I was bothered by what someone did or what something represents? It's not my way or what I want so I'm now annoyed. Maybe just maybe that thing or person even reminds me of something I once did, some sin, some embarrassment. Sin is like a snake bite, having imparted its venom which slowly works through the body sometimes quickly sometimes slowly always with the same intended end. Death! And not only in this life but for all eternity in hell.

What is our solution? God announced just that in our Gospel lesson today. <sup>14</sup> *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,* <sup>15</sup> *that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* <sup>16</sup> *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* <sup>17</sup> *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* <sup>18</sup> *Whoever believes in him is not condemned* (John 3:14-18a).

Our suffering or frustration in this world cannot save us. It may help us see the total helplessness in which we exist in this world and this is helpful for a self-absorbed society, but that's all it can do. Jesus suffering though, now that saves us completely. Even as it proves that God is not out to get us as we suffer but to save us from ourselves.

Paul told the Corinthians, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Corinthians 5:21). God took the very thing that was killing us, our sin, and placed it upon Jesus. Allowed Him to suffer all that we were suffering and more as He languished upon the cross suffering even the pain of hell as the Father turned His back on His Son and He does it so that you would be saved.

As we turn from ourselves to the cross, as faith believes in the one-time sacrifice for sin, the venom of the snake bite no longer affects us. Oh, to be sure satan will still bite in this world. In fact, he will rage all the more in an attempt to turn us away from God and back to ourselves. But Jesus has won the victory.

The resurrection was the proof that death, could no longer claim us. Anyone who looks upon the suffering of Christ, His saving work on the cross and believes, well they live. So Paul told the Ephesians in our second lesson, <sup>4</sup> *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,* <sup>5</sup> *made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.* <sup>6</sup> *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,* <sup>7</sup> *in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:4-7).

It seems like the strangest of solutions, doesn't it? Look to the very thing that is killing you for everlasting life. To put death on a pole for the people to look at and live. Ah, but then this is exactly what Christians have done for centuries and millennia. It takes center place in our churches. A cross the very instrument of death in Jesus' day, the very picture of sin, crime and punishment, it means you are forgiven. Dear Christian, take the sin that frustrates, yes, whether your own or that of someone else and put it on the pole, put it on the cross, put it on Christ. Know that it too like every other sin, all sin is forgiven in the His holy precious blood. His death there, well it means everlasting life is ours through faith Him. Yes, *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,* <sup>15</sup> *that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* Amen!