

Gospel reflections

John 3:14-21 The 4th Sunday in Lent

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Just prior to this passage Jesus teaches Nicodemus and says in vs13 “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.” This is another reminder in the series of reminders we’ve had in the Lenten readings that Jesus is no ordinary human. Instead, Jesus Christ, “the Son of God, is God and man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect man, of a rational soul and human flesh subsisting” (Athanasian creed). Only God could come and go from heaven.

This leads to verse 14 and talk of Jesus being lifted up. This could mean Jesus ascending to heaven and this will happen in due course. But the reference to Moses and the snake in Numbers 21 suggests another interpretation.

⁸ 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.” ⁹ 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, they lived.

At Easter it is Jesus lifted up on a wooden pole where we can look at him, Christ crucified, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians). When we lie on the ground before the cross, utterly helpless, dead and unable to save ourselves, Jesus Christ is the light that has saved us and gives us life. All we do is trust in him.

Our understanding of service learning is also in this passage, especially in verse 21. We live in the freedom of the gospel. In Lutheran education we value community and living in service to others ([Vision for Learners and Learning](#)) but this passage reminds us of why we serve. Service learning is not about good works to earn God’s or people’s approval. We’re already saved! We’re already in the light!

“Service is faith active in love. Service involves the selfless giving and loving of others, making a difference in their lives by responding to their needs, and acting without expecting recognition or reward. A Lutheran school challenges students to grow in their understanding that service is not only a personal response to God’s love but a broader response as part of one’s humanity for the sake of justice for all.” ([Service learning in Lutheran schools policy](#)).

Because God so loved the world, we live and serve.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, please bless all schools and early childhood services and the people who work, learn and grow within them in service to you and each other. Let your light shine out of the darkness so they may find you to be the source of all truth. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Lisa