March 10, 2024 **NO MATTER WHAT**

In the Holy Gospel appointed for this Sunday St. John 3: 14-21, our Lord refers to the manner in which Moses **"lifted up the serpent in the wilderness."** The incident to which our Lord referred is narrated in the First Lesson from Numbers 21: 4-9. The reason that Jesus saw a parallel between his own passion and the lifting up of the brazen serpent was because the conditions were the same. Whether it was Jesus who said it, or John the writer of the gospel editorialized about it, the fact is that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

The problem is that the world is perishing as surely as the Israelites were dying of poisonous venom. That is not difficult to see. Yet we are stuck with the hard fact that all nations still go to war. We know that we have to spend enormous sums to maintain a defense posture. Yet we have not found ways to make it just as emergent to fight the enemies of hunger, famine, and injustice all over the world. The world sows the seeds of its own destruction. Evil and demonic leadership shows us how people prefer to live in the bondage to their own desires rather than to live for the sake of others.

Another condition which is the same as that of the time of the children of Israel in the desert is that the world is in the dark. In his gospel John writes, "The people loved darkness rather than light." That was the same way in which the Israelites said they preferred the days of slavery in Egypt to the freedom under God in the desert. In the same way the world is in the dark today.

There is all kinds of evidence to support that the world is dark. There was a time when the great thinkers of the world, the philosophers, struggled with the great questions concerning life. We cannot learn about God apart from what God tells or teaches us about himself. However, God has not left himself without witness. God has revealed himself. Therefore, those who cannot see in the light of this witness are in the dark.

The world is very much in the dark and cannot find solutions to its own great problems. The behaviorists have to keep altering their findings and the human behavior changes. The sociologists have to keep revising their materials as the great social problems not only go unsolved but get larger and larger. The world is living in the dark. And the real tragedy, John writes, is that the "people loved darkness rather than light." The proof of that again is: just remember all the times when some crusader tries to bring about a social reform only to discover how much the world prefers its darkness.

Because people of the world "loved darkness rather than light, their deeds were evil." Sin is so obvious in the world that one does not have to advance much of an argument to show that people are capable of great evil. As a daily log on human behavior, the newspaper gives us case history after case history of the evil deeds of people. Those are the obvious and glaring forms of evil deeds. However, that is not all that is meant here.

The evangelist John explains his understanding of the deeds that are evil. He says, "All who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed." This would include all the deeds that people do that may be ever so acceptable and even laudable but which cannot be exposed because of their motivation. The person who does good service but does it for one's own selfish reasons or benefits is evil. All of the manipulating, the self-serving, and the selfish behavior of people is evil. No matter how pious or how religious people may sound in the doing of that which is aimed at elevating oneself, it is evil. Because the condition of the world is so perishable that it can produce only evil deeds in its darkened condition, only God could rescue it. God did that in the sending of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you would like to learn more please worship with us on Sunday at 11:00 AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister

West Center Congregational Church

101 Pondfield Road West

Bronxville, NY 10708