

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

March 14, 2021

Fourth Sunday in Lent, Year B

The readings this week:

- Numbers 21:4-9 ◦ Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
- Ephesians 2:1-10 ◦ John 3:14-21



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

The Dark Night

Who isn't sometimes restless, sometimes passionate, longing for something different—something more? It's certainly a theme fit for Lenten reflection.

In the verses right before this week's text, Nicodemus goes to Jesus because of a deep yearning. What do I need to do to be close to God? To be right with God? How can I have more meaning in my life?

Though he is a religious leader, something is lacking. He is educated, well-connected, respected. He's unlike some Pharisees Jesus has criticized for hypocrisy, the ones who thought they had nothing left to learn, that there was no room for growth, that they never made a mistake, that God was on their side. Nicodemus is far less certain. He wants something more.

Jesus gives a long answer with many moving parts. It's about salvation and eternal life, about God's love for the world, and about darkness and light (a common theme for John's gospel).

Why does Nicodemus come at night? Did he have to work all day? Is he afraid for people to see him—a religious leader—looking for something new, so he comes under cover of darkness? Or is night the time when his yearnings for something more get the better of him? He is hesitant. He doesn't know what he needs, but his yearning sends him on this journey in the dark. He ends up knocking on the door of the house where Jesus is staying—that rabbi who sounds so engaging.

People are often troubled at night. Darkness can be overwhelming, and light so elusive. They can't sleep because their minds are churning over the events of the day, or they are worried about how they'll pay the bills, or they are watching over a sick child, partner, or parent, or they feel guilty, or they are afraid of tomorrow.

When the darkness descends, where do you go? What questions do you ask? What answers are beyond your reach?

The good news is that you're not condemned for being afraid or guilty or troubled. Those feelings that generate

darkness, or that are generated by the darkness, are welcomed, and invited into the light of God's presence.

For 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. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

~ Melissa Bane Sevier, [Contemplative Viewfinder](#)



Let us rejoice: God so loves the world!
May God your Maker
send you back into the world with creative energies
refreshed.
May Christ the Light
illuminate your darkest moments.
And may the Holy Spirit of steadfast love
guide you until we worship together again.
This day and forevermore. Amen!

~ Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel, in *So Loved: Service Prayers for the Fourth Sunday of Lent*, [Worship Ways](#)

Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

Imagining your life as a journey, to what destination are you currently traveling? How would you describe this interaction between the Israelite people and God? What prompted what? What does each action/reaction of the Israelites tell us about their character? What does each action/reaction of God tell us about His character? If you were in the shoes of the Israelites at the beginning of verse 4, how do you think you should have responded? Why did the Israelites respond the way they did? How does this account summarize all of Scripture? How does this account relate to your relationship with God? In moments where you have felt lost, how have you been reminded of the presence of God in your life? [Fellowship of Christian Athletes](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22](#)

“[The Lord’s] mercy endures for ever.” Forever? Forever is a long time—unfathomable even at the limits of our imagination. We struggle to comprehend how anything could last forever, because all of our life is defined by limitations and boundaries. We are born and soon after we discover that this life, as we currently know it, will not last forever. For this reason and if we are wise, we seek to make the most of our lives—living fully into each moment. Still, even in our knowing that this life will not last forever, we fail. We make mistakes and we fall short of the plans we make to become the best version of our selves. Today—in our Psalm, we are reminded that it is in our limitedness that we find reason to give thanks to the Lord, for we have been redeemed and his mercy endures forever, extending beyond the limits of our wildest imagination and the boundaries of this temporal life. As we contemplate the everlasting mercy of God, in what ways do you feel challenged to be more merciful to others in your life? [Episcopal Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Even when we were dead, Paul writes.
Even when we turned away from the One who had created us.
Even when we lived in the grip of what drew our gaze from God.
Even when we were oblivious.
Even when we followed a path fashioned of nothing but our own desires.
Even when we wandered far and willfully away.
Even when we forgot to look past our own feet and to see the wonders not of our making.
Even when we failed to stand in awe, to breathe thanks, to lean into the love that had waited long for us.
Even when, Paul writes.
Even when, even then: grace.

~ Jan L. Richardson, [The Painted Prayerbook](#)

The Cross is the Medicine of the World

Crux est porta paradisi,
In qua sancti sunt confisi,
Qui vicerunt omnia.
Crux ext mundi medicina,
Per quam bonitas divina
Facit mirabilia.

Lo, the cross is heaven’s portal,
In which trust the saints immortal,
Who have conquered in the fight.
This world find the cross its healing,
God’s own goodness still revealing
By its wonder-working might.

Monastic hymn, Bonaventure 1221-1274
(first verse), via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [Ephesians 2:1-10](#)

What sort of behavior and lifestyle does Paul propose characterized our condition before we become Christians? How might you summarize or categorize what God has done versus what we have done according to this section? In view of the phrase used to live being in past tense, how we might expect Christian’s lives to be different than non-Christians? What changes have you noticed or that you would expect in the lifestyle of a person who becomes a Christian? What might you do today to assure that you will go to heaven? Given the statement that God has already prepared good works for you to do in advance, how does this affect your view towards your particular ministry? How might you discover what these good works are? [Berean Christian](#)

___ 4th Reading: [John 3:14-21](#)

John 3:16 is certainly well-known... but do you think it completely expresses what it means to be a Christian? Why or why not? Why is it significant that Nicodemus came to Jesus at nighttime, rather than publicly in the day? What is symbolic about his nighttime visit? To understand Jesus’ in verse 14, we need to know the story. Read Numbers 21:4-9. How does the story of God’s salvation from the snakes parallel the story of God’s salvation through Jesus? What do you think it means to “believe in” Jesus? Is it more than just a mental exercise? What does it mean to actively believe or have faith in Jesus? What are we expressing spiritually when we do this?. Ponder what Jesus is saying in verses 19-21 – what does it mean that people who do evil are afraid of the light? What does it mean to come into the light – is it easy to do? How does this require active faith? [Faith Element](#)