



Celebrate

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 14, 2021

The fourth of the Old Testament promises providing a baptismal lens this Lent is the promise God makes to Moses: those who look on the bronze serpent will live. In today's gospel Jesus says he will be lifted up on the cross like the serpent, so that those who look to him in faith will live. When we receive the sign of the cross in baptism, that cross becomes the sign we can look to in faith for healing, for restored relationship to God, for hope when we are dying.

Prayer of the Day

O God, rich in mercy, by the humiliation of your Son you lifted up this fallen world and rescued us from the hopelessness of death. Lead us into your light, that all our deeds may reflect your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

First Reading

Though God provides food and water for the Israelites in the wilderness, they whine and grumble. They forget about the salvation they experienced in the exodus. God punishes them for their sin, but when they repent God also provides a means of healing: a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole.

From Mount Hor [the Israelites] set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way.⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food."⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking

against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."⁹ So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Numbers 21:4-9



You de - liv - er your peo - ple from their dis - tress.

Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good, for God's mercy endures forever.

2 Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim that God redeemed them from the hand of the foe, gathering them in from the lands;

17 Some were fools and took re- bellious paths; through their sins they were afflicted.

18 They loathed all manner of food and drew near to death's door.

19 Then in their trouble they cried to the LORD and you delivered them from their distress. **R**

20 You sent forth your word and healed them and rescued them from the grave.

21 Let them give thanks to you, LORD, for your steadfast love and your wonderful works for all people.

22 Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of your deeds with shouts of joy. **R**

While we were dead in our sinfulness, God acted to make us alive as a gift of grace in Christ Jesus. We are saved not by what we do but by grace through faith. Thus our good works are really a reflection of God's grace at work in our lives.

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace

you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Gospel

John 3:14-21

To explain the salvation of God to the religious leader, Nicodemus, Jesus refers to the scripture passage quoted in today's first reading. Just as those who looked upon the bronze serpent were healed, so people will be saved when they behold Christ lifted up on the cross.

[Jesus said:] “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“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.

¹⁷“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. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe

are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰“For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

You sent your Son that the world might be saved through him. Inspire the witness of the church throughout the world. Empower missionaries, Bible translators, and ministries of service in your name. Bless our partners in ministry (*specific mission partners may be named*), our ELCA global partner churches, and Young Adults in Global Mission. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

From east to west your steadfast love is shown. Nourish seas and deserts, wilderness areas and cities. Give water to thirsty lands; nurture spring growth that feeds hungry creatures; bless farmers as they prepare for the growing season. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You sustained your people in the wilderness. Give courage to all who lead in times of crisis and scarce resources. Prosper the work of those who aid victims of famine and drought (*especially*). Bring peace in places where scarce resources cause violence. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday Psalm 107:1-16. **Tuesday** 1 Corinthians 10:6-13. **Wednesday** (commemoration of Patrick, bishop, missionary to Ireland, 461) Isaiah 60:15-22. **Thursday** Psalm 51:1-12. **Friday** (Joseph, Guardian of Jesus) Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24a. **Saturday** John 12:1-11. **Fifth Sunday in Lent** (commemoration of Thomas Cranmer, Bishop of Canterbury, martyr, 1556) Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 119:9-16; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33.

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Tracks 1 and 2

Your mercy endures forever. Deliver all who cry to you, especially those who are hungry or without homes. Give life in places where death seems triumphant; give healing to those who are sick and comfort to those who mourn. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

By grace we have been saved. Fill this congregation to overflowing with that grace, that we show mercy to others. Nourish any in our midst who are hungry, especially children, and bless our ministries of feeding and shelter (*especially*). Give us patience and courage when the way seems long. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Your Son was lifted up that whoever believes might have eternal life. We praise you for all who have died in Christ. Bring us with all the saints into the fullness of your promises. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.