

The Fourth SUNDAY of LENT

14 March 2021

Grace Episcopal Church

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Honesdale, PA

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The Fourth Sunday in Lent, 2021
Virtual Grace

Organ Prelude -

“Vater unser in Himmelreich”

G. P. Telemann

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hello and welcome to “Virtual Grace”
from Grace Episcopal Church in Honesdale, PA.
I’m Fr. Ed, the rector of our parish, and we’re glad you’re here in “Virtual Grace,”
as we continue to offer these services,
not knowing when we will be able to open our doors again
to offer our worship and the Sacrament in community.

We are deeply grateful for all the help, donations, best wishes and prayers
that have been offered to the Church.
And call me if you, or anyone you know, are in any pastoral need at all.

This is the Fourth Sunday in Lent.
Walking with Jesus in these forty days, even in our own wilderness,
in this continued pandemic experience,
we are constantly are reminded of the 500,000 Americans,
and others around the world who have succumbed to the virus,
those who have lost jobs and those who face eviction.

Eternal Lord of love, behold your Church
walking once more the pilgrim way of Lent,
led by your cloud by day, by night your fire,
moved by your love and toward your presence bent:
far off yet here– the goal of all desire.

So daily dying to the way of self,
so daily living to your way of love,
we walk the road, Lord Jesus, that you trod,
knowing ourselves baptized into your death:
so we are dead and live with you in God.

Thomas Cain, Hymn # 149

Let us prepare ourselves for hearing God’s Word and offering our prayers.

Hear the commandments of God to his people.

After each Commandment, repeat with me: *Amen. Have mercy, O God.*

God said, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of bondage.

You shall have no other gods but me.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

You shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

Honor your father and your mother.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

You shall not commit murder.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

You shall not commit adultery.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

You shall not steal.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

You shall not be a false witness.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Amen. Have mercy, O God.

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,

by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;

that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways,

to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
strengthen us in all goodness,
and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.

Let us pray:

The COLLECT of the DAY (Lent 4)

BCP p. 219

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

FIRST READING

Numbers 21:4-9

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. 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." Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 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. 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." 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.

Here ends the Reading.

GRADUAL

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

BCP p. 746

- 1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, *
and his mercy endures for ever.
- 2 Let all those whom the Lord has redeemed proclaim *
that he redeemed them from the hand of the foe.

3 He gathered them out of the lands; *
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.
17 Some were fools and took to rebellious ways; *
they were afflicted because of their sins.
18 They abhorred all manner of food *
and drew near to death's door.
19 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, *
and he delivered them from their distress.
20 He sent forth his word and healed them *
and saved them from the grave.
21 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his mercy *
and the wonders he does for his children.
22 Let them offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving *
and tell of his acts with shouts of joy.

SECOND READING

John 3:14-21

✚ Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "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. Those 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. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But 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."

Here ends the Reading.

MEDITATION

In the silent darkness of night I wandered cautiously through the streets,
taking the back passages to avoid detection.

You have to understand how crucial this is, this secrecy,
as I, Nicodemus, a respected Rabbi, a Pharisee,
a member of the Jewish High Council, the Sanhedrin,
I must cover my actions - my curiosity -
in the matter of this Jesus of Nazareth.

I've heard the stories of his healing people - like some old prophet - or a charlatan.
I've listened to him preach - honestly, I can't disagree with him.

There are all sorts of corruption of the faith
trying to maintain the Pax Roma - the supposed peace of the Romans.

It's really subjugation - oppression - holding us Jews hostage.

This Jesus - he preaches the Kingdom of God!

I have to learn more;

I have to know;

I have to believe.

He's a Rabbi, an equal,

“Jesus, we know that you are a teacher, sent by God.

For no one could do what you do unless God were with him.”

“Nicodemus, I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God
unless you are born again.”

I wrestle with this.

How can a grown man enter again into his mother's womb
and be born again.

I then come to understand that Jesus is speaking spiritually - eternally,
and I'm thinking in human terms, physically - mortally.

How often that is true!

We Pharisees argue with the Sadducees that yes, there is an eternal life;
there is a spiritual being as well as a physical being.

So why is this so hard for me to grasp?

I see, now - Jesus is talking about things I should believe.

Yes, yes!

“Jesus, I think I understand, but I need to wrap my mind around it.”

Don't we all - all of us - say the same thing in our hearts?

And what happens?

A few chapters later on in John's Gospel,

Nicodemus addresses the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Council, saying

"Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out
what they are really doing, does it?"

John 7:50

The encounter of Nicodemus and Jesus in the dark of night
is followed by John's famous quote in today's reading -

one of the most quoted sentences in Scripture, John 3:16
and misunderstood by Evangelicals the world around:

“God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son
that whosoever believeth in him, might not die
but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

Sadly, most end it there, using it as a gate-key

for allowing those in and preventing those out of the kingdom -
those we want and those we don't want in *our* kingdom -
not God's kingdom -

the walls we build around our safe fortress of conviction.

But John continues,

God came not into this world to condemn the world,
but that the world through him might be saved.

John 3:17

Nicodemus is one who models for me one growing in faith.
Nick works at his faith, struggles with the questions, learns and grows
through his encounters with Christ.
He studies, prays, engages in the standard religion and questions,
then is nudged by something new that will shake his spirit
to new life - a jump to a deeper spirituality of life.
A new birth through the Spirit.

You may not remember that at the end of the story
Nicodemus goes with Joseph of Aramathea
another high-official in the Jewish court,
to ask for Jesus' body for burial.
Something which for a Pharisee member of the Sanhedrin would not be normal.
But Nick was not so normal.

Slowly, ever so slowly,
Nick grows in the faith of Jesus
and the believing, the knowing,
and the understanding.
Not a bad ending for one who questioned Christ in the secret of darkness,
and questioned Jesus and questioned within himself,
doubting and growing in that doubt of faith.

God came not into the world to condemn the world.
But that the world - one individual at a time - might be saved.
May we too, study, struggle, question ourselves and our savior
and by doing so be re-born in the Spirit to new life, to eternal life.

After all, it is Satan who judges and condemns, but:
God came not into this world to condemn the world,
but that the world through him might be saved.

John 3:17

Jesus came to advocate for us before the judge.

For if we look at it truthfully, Satan is the one sitting in judgement.

It is for the Advocate, the Holy Spirit who redeems us in the Truth.

God so loved the world.

Praised be The Name.

AMEN.

Let us proclaim our faith in the words of our Baptismal Creed.

The CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection † of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS, Form II, modified

BCP p. 385

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for Justin, the Archbishop of Canterbury; Michael our Presiding Bishop and Kevin our Bishop; for our parish family, especially those we remember this week: Maggie & Nick, Peggy & Rob, Hannah, Chris and Robert, Dolores, Dianne & Bob, Jordan, Kyle and Jared, Angie & Neil, Ashlea and Jaymes; and for all God's people. Pray for the Church.

I ask your prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. For Joe and Kamala, our President and Vice President, Tom our Governor, and Sarah our Mayor. Pray for justice and peace.

I ask your prayers for the poor, the sick, especially Patty, Neil, Fr. Graham and Richelle; for the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison, especially Justin and Mitch. Pray for those in any need or trouble.

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of him, especially our Confirmation class: Hannah, Elise, Harry, Ewan, Ethan and Lucas. Pray that they may find and be found by him.

I ask your prayers for the departed especially the 500,000 Americans who succumbed to the pandemic, and those killed by violent acts. Pray for those who have died.

I ask your prayers for those celebrating birthdays this week: Elise and Bill.

Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored. Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

To sum up all these petitions, let us pray together the words Jesus taught us:

Our Father...

BLESSING

Book of Occasional Services, p. 25, *modified*

Look mercifully on this your family, Almighty God, that by your great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore; through Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

Hymn -

“God so loved the world”

J. Stainer