

Fourth Sunday in Lent Sunday, March 11, 2018

The Collect: 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.**

Old Testament: Numbers 21:4-9 read from the God's Word Bible

Then they moved from Mount Hor, following the road that goes to the Red Sea, in order to get around Edom. The people became impatient on the trip and criticized God and Moses. They said, "Why did you make us leave Egypt—just to let us die in the desert? There's no bread or water, and we can't stand this awful food!"

So the Lord sent poisonous snakes among the people. They bit the people, and many of the Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we criticized the Lord and you. Pray to the Lord so that he will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

The Lord said to Moses, "Make a snake, and put it on a pole. Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. People looked at the bronze snake after they were bitten, and they lived.

The word of the Lord

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22 read from The Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer

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.

Epistle: Ephesians 2:1-10 read from the Holman Christian Standard Bible

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler who exercises authority over the lower heavens, the spirit now working in the disobedient. We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! Together with Christ Jesus He also raised us up and seated us in the heavens, so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift—not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.

The Word of the Lord

Gospel: John 3:14-21 read from the International Children's Bible

“Moses lifted up the snake in the desert. It is the same with the Son of Man. The Son of Man must be lifted up too. Then everyone who believes in him can have eternal life.

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into

the world to judge the world guilty, but to save the world through him. He who believes in God's Son is not judged guilty. He who does not believe has already been judged guilty, because he has not believed in God's only Son. People are judged by this fact: I am the Light from God that has come into the world. But men did not want light. They wanted darkness because they were doing evil things. Everyone who does evil hates the light. He will not come to the light because it will show all the evil things he has done. But he who follows the true way comes to the light. Then the light will show that the things he has done were done through God."

The Gospel of the Lord

Closing Prayer: On March 12th we remember Gregory the Great, Bishop and Doctor

Only two popes, Leo I and Gregory I, have been given the popular title of "the Great." Both served during difficult times of barbarian invasions in Italy; and during Gregory's term of office, Rome was also faced with famine and epidemics.

Gregory was born around 540, of a politically influential family, and in 573 he became Prefect of Rome; but shortly afterwards he resigned his office and began to live as a monk. In 579 he was made apocrisiarius, the representative of the Pope to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Shortly after his return home, the Pope died of the plague, and in 590 Gregory was elected Pope.

Like Leo before him, he became practical governor of central Italy, because the job needed to be done and there was no one else to do it. When the Lombards invaded, he organized the defense of Rome against them, and the eventual signing of a treaty with them. When there was a shortage of food, he organized the importation and distribution of grain from Sicily.

His influence on the forms of public worship throughout Western Europe was enormous. He founded a school for the training of church musicians, and Gregorian chant (plainchant) is named for him. The schedule of Scripture readings for the various Sundays of the year, and the accompanying prayers (many of them written by him), in use throughout most of Western Christendom for the next thirteen centuries, is largely due to his passion for organization. His

treatise, *On Pastoral Care*, while not a work of creative imagination, shows a dedication to duty, and an understanding of what is required of a minister in charge of a Christian congregation. His sermons are still readable today, and it is not without reason that he is accounted (along with Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine of Hippo) as one of the Four Latin Doctors (or Teachers) of the ancient Church.

English-speaking Christians will remember Gregory for sending a party of missionaries headed by Augustine of Canterbury (not to be confused with the more famous Augustine of Hippo) to preach the Gospel to the pagan Anglo-Saxon tribes that had invaded England and largely conquered or displaced the Celtic Christians previously living there. Gregory had originally hoped to go to England as a missionary himself, but was pressed into service elsewhere, first as apocrisiarius and then as bishop of Rome. He accordingly sent others, but took an active interest in their work, writing numerous letters both to Augustine and his monks and to their English converts.

Gregory died on March 12th, 604, and is buried in St. Peter's Basilica. His life was a true witness to the title he assumed for his office: "Servant of the servants of God."

Let us pray: Almighty and merciful God, who raised up Gregory of Rome to be a servant of the servants of God, and inspired him to send missionaries to preach the Gospel to the English people: Preserve in your Church the catholic and apostolic faith they taught, that your people, being fruitful in every good work, may receive the crown of glory that never fades away; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.