



Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sermon by Revd Allie Joseph



Sunday 14 March 2021

READINGS

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

The difference between darkness and light.

This Sunday sees Jesus having a conversation with Nicodemus, a teacher of the law and a member of the Jewish council. What we read in the gospel is part of what Jesus said to him.

Jesus told him that in order to be saved one needs to be born again. It was very difficult for Nicodemus, an expert in the law. To understand this, so Jesus took him back to the Old Testament and tells him how we are brought to life, eternal life, in Jesus. There are very strong themes in this reading.

- ◆ Death and life.
- ◆ Darkness and light
- ◆ Judgment and salvation
- ◆ Life and eternal life

I want us to look at darkness and light and how eternal life is choosing the difference between these two.

Darkness

We have seen just in the last century all the evil that was done and all the hate that resulted in millions of lives lost. The two world wars, various conflicts, the holocaust, genocide, and racism, terrible things that happened in Russia, Uganda, China, Cambodia, Somalia, the middle east, and even as we speak the terrible suffering in Syria and Yemen.

Looking at the effects of the darkness that is to be found here in our own part of the world, we take a moment and pray for those who suffer as a result. There is so much darkness in the world that we need to bring it into the light and under the grace and mercy of the Lord of light.

Our world has grown so accustomed to this darkness and the indifference of individualism and self-importance that we become more and more accustomed to letting people live their lives in loneliness because we live in this zero-sum world where in order for us to win someone must lose.

Jesus the saviour

It is into this world that Jesus comes. He is the son of man who was to be lifted up like the bronze serpent in the wilderness. At that time people were impatient with Moses and Aaron, they were complaining because they had to wander through the desert and there was no water nor food. Consequently, terrible serpents appeared, bit the people, and killed them. God offered them salvation in the form of a bronze serpent that was held up on a standard. When they looked at the serpent they were healed and spared of certain death. The serpent became the image of death and life.

We hear in Jesus' own words: "when the son of man is lifted up, he will draw all people unto himself." Unlike those in the desert Jesus offers not life but eternal life to those who believe in him.

Light

Where I come from there are no tall buildings and no city lights, so on a clear night it is really dark and when you look up you can see the stars in brilliant light. Many of my friends who visit in the rural Northern Cape tells me that the stars shine brighter in the dark.

Light, like a lighthouse, guiding those lost on the high seas of this life home to the safety and the love of their God. This light is like the light that keeps us from fear of what hides in the dark. In South Africa we have a very interesting experience of darkness. Not only because of the evil of load shedding, more than that, the darkness that is because of lost hope and resignation of our goodwill. Here is where ubuntu starts and here is where cities are as dangerous as war zones.

Yes, there is darkness in the world, but there is also light. You and I are called to be that light in the darkness. Jesus is the light of the world and we are called to reflect that light in and through us.

The difference between darkness and light.

Jesus speaks these words to Nicodemus and us. Reminding us that the difference between light and darkness is love. Hear the words again: God so loved the world that he gave his only son, not to condemn the world but that through him the world might be saved.

Love brings light, sheds light into the deepest recesses of a world overcome by darkness. Love lets us pay in advance and pay it forward because it fills us with hope. This is the love that Jesus talks of. Not the love that is practiced in this world. Love for the self over and above and even sometimes at the cost of others. We have much to benefit from this generosity of God for God's love is universal, it does not exact judgment, nor does it condemn, instead it covers all. Unlike the love we find in the world. What motivates God is love. God's love that brings salvation.

What motivates our love and where does our love lead us? There is so much we can do with this love we receive from God. In a world where so many people are overcome by darkness. So many giving up on life because they cannot see the light anymore. Just look at the statistics on gender-based violence and suicide, indicative of a world that lost hope.

Christians are called to be that light, a light that shines in the darkness, a light that brings hope and fuels dreams. So many times, people come to Christians looking for light and they find judgment and condemnation. The truth is that there are within each of us some shades of darkness and light. The challenge is to allow the light to shine and to allow others to also let their light shine. I suggest we look to Jesus and start being the light that saves instead of judge. That shows love and that accepts the weaknesses in others and leads them to the light.