



22B LENT 4B - ONLINE LITURGY

Looking Up

Abstract

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22B Lent 4B - Online liturgy

Looking Up

Sunday, March 14, 2021 | Lent | Fourth Sunday in Lent | Year B

Old Testament Numbers 21:4–9
Psalm Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22
New Testament Ephesians 2:1–10
Gospel John 3:14–21ⁱ

Nicodemus was a Jewish leader who was a Pharisee. Jesus speaks to him of being sent because of God's love, to offer eternal life to the world. He uses the image of light and darkness to explain the concept of judgement. Those who do wrong things avoid the light, because it reveals what they are doing, but those who do what is good and true are attracted to the light.

How do we understand 'eternal life'? And what difference does that make to our everyday lives?

This week we explore trusting in something eternal.

	<p>Pre-Service P&W 40 - The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases</p>
	<p>Introit</p>
	<p>Greeting</p> <p>May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ The Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all</p> <p>and also with us</p>
	<p>We Gather</p> <p>Jesus was lifted up on the cross so that all could come to him. Let us choose to seek God in this place today, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus and choosing to follow him.</p> <p>Acknowledgements</p> <p><i>Let us pray</i> God of creation and order, be with us as we gather for worship. Help us to think carefully about the choices we make and the people we look up to. Lead us in the confusions and temptations of this world. Teach us to look up to the light of your Son, Jesus Christ,</p>

	<p>for guidance and inspiration. Amen.</p>
	<p>Hymn/song Walking in the Light of God</p>
	<p>Welcome</p> <p>A prayer of approach Lord God, we approach your light. The light that shines in the darkness of our world. The light that searches the darkness of our hearts. The light that banishes the shadows that surround us. The light that causes some to turn away because they prefer the darkness. But we lift our faces to your light and walk towards you. Lord God, we approach your light. Amen.</p>
	<p>We <i>As we come into God's holy presence, we confess our complete dependence on the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We say sorry. Let us pray.</i></p> <p>Lord, your light has flooded the world; but we have turned away, preferring darkness. Lord, you have lifted up your Son that we might be forgiven; but we have turned away, preferring to remain in our sins. Lord, you have offered us eternal life; but we have turned away, preferring the pleasures of earthly life. Forgive us, O Lord, as we bow our heads before you. We do not turn away any longer. We lift our faces to seek your light. We lift our eyes to see your Son. We lift our hearts to live in you, and for you, for ever. Amen.</p>
	<p>Words of Assurance</p> <p>God raised the serpent in the desert so that the children of Israel might be healed; those who chose to look upon it lived. God lifted up his Son upon a cross, so that all might be saved and have eternal life; those who choose to believe in him are forgiven their sins, and will know the joys of heaven.</p> <p>O God, every day you offer us choices; ours is the decision between good and evil, the path of righteousness or the road to destruction. Thank you for showing us the good and true way through your Son.</p>

	<p>Thank you for forgiving us and guiding our feet back even when we turn the wrong way. Thank you for your eternal love.</p> <p>Our sins are forgiven Thanks be to God Amen.</p>
	<p>Readings Numbers 21:4–9 John 3:1–21</p> <p><i>respond</i> For the word of the Lord Thanks be to God</p>
	<p>Hymn/song/video Give thanks with a grateful heart</p>

Response

What Really Matters

John 3:1-21

English explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton was preparing to return from the South Pole.

The party knew they would have to leave possessions behind to survive.

He writes that he was profoundly impressed with the things

his companions considered important.

For example, they left their money behind.

They even threw away their food knapsacks.

But they kept letters and pictures of loved ones.

Today we're going to talk about love

the kind of love that caused those explorers to leave behind material things
and cling to pictures and letters from their loved ones.

Our reading today includes John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

We all know we live in a world where word love is used and misused in so many ways

so let's use another word for our purposes today—the word relationship.

Maybe the only thing in life that really counts is relationships.

Certainly, money and success are often considered important

But neither means anything in comparison to the people we love.

We have relationships with those closest to us.

With our loved ones, our wives, our partners, our children.

Those we are related to.

What a great and wonderful thing to love and to be loved!

A young family had a little girl three years old, and a brand-new baby boy.

Someone asked the little girl, “Do you like your new baby brother.”

“Oh no,” she answered, “I don’t like him. I love him.”
Even at that early age that little one is sensitive to what really counts in life
our relationship with those closest to us.

How quick we are to forget that fact.

We who are so busy working ourselves so that we can give our families everything,
when all they really need or want is us.

That’s the one nice thing about the isolating we were forced to do during the pandemic.
Hopefully, it’s given some of us a time to reconnect.

**But there is another family that we don't talk about like we should
and that is the total human family to which we all belong.**

That family includes everyone on this earth.

We all have inherited a house--this wonderful earth.

It's a big house, but we've become a big family. Billions of us.

And we're a very diverse family

Chinese, Japanese, Africans, Indians, Russians, Europeans, our first peoples and English settlers.

We've inherited this wonderful house,

and our task is to learn to live in it together.

Isn't it tragic that the human family has been torn through the ages
by so much hatred and violence? And it's so needless too.
If only we realized that we are all children of God.

The Rabbis used to tell a story of the exodus.

God was very busy at the time of the exodus.

And so God appointed a committee of angels to take care of parting the Red Sea.

The angels, using the power that God gave them,

parted the waters of the sea so that the children of Israel could walk through it.

Then came the Egyptians.

So the angels waited and when the Egyptians reached the middle of the sea,

the angels caused the waters to close and drown the entire Egyptian army.

Triumphantly the angels shouted and cheered, “We got 'em, we got 'em, we got 'em.”

Then God looked over the banister of heaven,

and said to that committee of angels, “You’re no longer in my service.”

“But we got them,” the angels protested.

And God said, “Don’t you know? The Egyptians are also my children.”

Remember, that story is told by Jewish Rabbisⁱⁱ.

We are all children of God.

Regardless of our skin colour, our ethnic background or nationality, or our religion.

In 1983, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon.

There was a rumour that Israel was planning a prolonged siege of Beirut,

and so members of a church began to buy up all the canned food they could.

They were hoarding life’s essentials

just as many of us did when the coronavirus first hit this country.

And their fears were justified. West Beirut was totally cut-off.

And so the church met to decide how to distribute the food they had purchased.

Two proposals were put on the table.

The first proposal was to distribute food to the church members first,
then other Christians secondly,
and last—if any food was left—to their Muslim neighbours.

The second proposal was different.

First, food would be given to their Muslim neighbours, then to other Christians,
finally— if there was any left over—to church members.

An older, quiet, much respected Elder, a woman, stood up and said,

‘If we do not demonstrate the love of Christ in this place, who will?’”

And guess what? The second motion passed. ⁱⁱⁱ

They distributed food to their Muslim neighbours first.

“If we do not demonstrate the love of Christ in this place, who will?”

That would be a good motto for the church today.

So we relate to the family of our loved ones, the human family.

**But there is, of course, a third relationship that is more important than all the others
that is our relationship with God.**

“This is love,” says 1 John 4:10, “not that we loved God,

but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

What a powerful sentence: “not that we loved God, but that he loved us.”

In 1864, received news that her husband was killed in action.

However, that same day, a telegram arrived announcing
that he was not dead, only badly injured.

Was he dead or alive she wondered?

So she set out on a journey through dangerous territory to find him.

She found her husband, injured but alive.

Later he would tell audiences of his loving wife who risked her own life

“wandering over all Kingdom Come in search of her husband’s corpse
only to be surprised by finding him alive and kicking.” ^{iv}

In the same way, imagine God “wandering over all Kingdom Come”

in order to bring us home into a loving relationship with Him.

“This is love, not that we loved God,

but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

Then the author of I John adds these crowning words,

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God;

but if we love one another,

God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

That’s what life is all about

loving relationships with those closest to us,

with the rest of God’s children scattered all over the world,

and with the God who created us and sustains us with His love today.

Chances are that, before you are through with this life,

Each of us will face many hardships and much distress.

Have you developed that relationship with God

that will give you strength to bear any burden,
endure any heartache, be victorious over every evil?

God loves us extravagantly.

“God so loved the world . . .” proclaims our lesson for the day.

Here is the most amazing thing about the Christian faith.

It is the message that the Creator God

who brought into being everything that is or was or will ever be,

wants to have an intimate relationship with every person on earth.

It makes no difference where you come from, who you are, what you’ve done.

God wants to be closer to you than any friend, any associate, any spouse you’ve ever known.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,

that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

God wants an intimate, personal relationship with you.

All you have to do is invite Him into your heart.^v

Amen

	<p>Hymn/song TIS 721 He became poor that we may be rich Bell</p>
	<p>Offering How deep the Father's love for us - Townend</p>
	<p>Notices</p>
	<p>Prayers for all people</p>
	<p>Lord’s Prayer Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. AMEN.^{vi}</p>
	<p>Hymn/song 01 Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks</p>
	<p>We are sent out Lord of light, help us to look to you in the coming week. Guide us when the way ahead seems dark and full of obstacles. May we always give thanks, even in the darkest times, and enable us to shine as lights in the world. Amen.</p> <p>May the Lord bless us</p>

	<p>and keep us May His face shine upon us and be gracious to us May he lift up His countenance upon us and give us peace</p>
	Benediction
	Thank you

ⁱ Revised Common Lectionary. (2009). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife.

ⁱⁱ The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock, (p. 51). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ [The Christian Life, A Geography of God, p. 126]. Cited by John M. Buchanan,
<http://rockefeller.uchicago.edu/Sermons/guests/021504sermon.html>.

^{iv} (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1996), pp. 20-25.

^v Dynamic Preaching First Quarter Sermons by King Duncan

^{vi} English Language Liturgical Consultation, 1988.