

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her.
Be joyful, all who were in mourning;
exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.

COLLECT

O God, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING 2 Chronicles 36:14-16,19-23

A reading from the second book of Chronicles.

All the heads of the priesthood, and the people too, added infidelity to infidelity, copying all the shameful practices of the nations and defiling the Temple that the Lord had consecrated for himself in Jerusalem. The Lord, the God of their ancestors, tirelessly sent them messenger after messenger, since he wished to spare his people and his house. But they ridiculed the messengers of God, they despised his words, they laughed at his prophets, until at last the wrath of the Lord rose so high against his people that there was no further remedy.

Their enemies burned down the Temple of God, demolished the walls of Jerusalem, set fire to all its palaces, and destroyed everything of value in it. The survivors were deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon; they were to serve him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. This is how the word of the Lord was fulfilled that he spoke through Jeremiah, "Until this land has enjoyed its sabbath rest, until seventy years have gone by, it will keep sabbath throughout the days of its desolation."

And in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord that was spoken through Jeremiah, the Lord roused the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to issue a proclamation and to have it publicly displayed throughout his kingdom: "Thus speaks Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; he has ordered me to build him a Temple in Jerusalem, in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God be with him! Let him go up.'"

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM

Psalm 136

Response:

**O let my tongue cleave to my mouth
if I remember you not!**

1. By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept, remembering Zion: on the poplars that grew there we hung our harps. (R.)

2. For it was there that they asked us, our captors, for songs, our oppressors, for joy. 'Sing to us,' they said, 'one of Zion's songs.' (R.)

3. O how could we sing the song of the Lord on alien soil? If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! (R.)

4. O let my tongue cleave to my mouth if I remember you not, if I prize not Jerusalem above all my joys!. (R.)

SECOND READING Ephesians 2:4-10

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians.

God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy: when we were dead through our sins, he brought us to life with Christ - it is through grace that you have been saved - and raised us up with him and gave us a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus.

This was to show for all ages to come, through his goodness towards us in Christ Jesus, how infinitely rich he is in grace. Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus to live the good life as from the beginning he has meant us to live it.

The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Glory and praise to you, O Christ!
God loved the world so much that he gave
his only Son;
everyone who believes in him has eternal
life.
Glory and praise to you, O Christ!**

GOSPEL

John 3:14-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus said to Nicodemus:

"The Son of Man must be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life.

For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved.

No one who believes in him will be condemned; but whoever refuses to believe is condemned already, because he has refused to believe in the name of God's only Son. On these grounds is sentence pronounced: that though the light has come into the world

men have shown they prefer darkness to the light because their deeds were evil. And indeed, everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear his actions should be exposed; but the man who lives by the truth comes out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what he does is done in God."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God,
the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
(all bow during the next three lines)**

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father almighty;
from there he will come 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 life everlasting.
Amen.**

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS

We place before you with joy these offerings, which bring eternal remedy, O Lord, praying that we may both faithfully revere them and present them to you, as is fitting, for the salvation of all the world. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Jerusalem is built as a city bonded as one
together.
It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of
the Lord,
to praise the name of the Lord.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

O God, who enlighten everyone who comes into this world, illuminate our hearts, we pray, with the splendour of your grace, that we may always ponder what is worthy and pleasing to your majesty and love you in all sincerity. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

11 MARCH 2018

Sunday Message

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

THE WORD

Year B • Season colour: Purple or Rose • Psalter Week 4

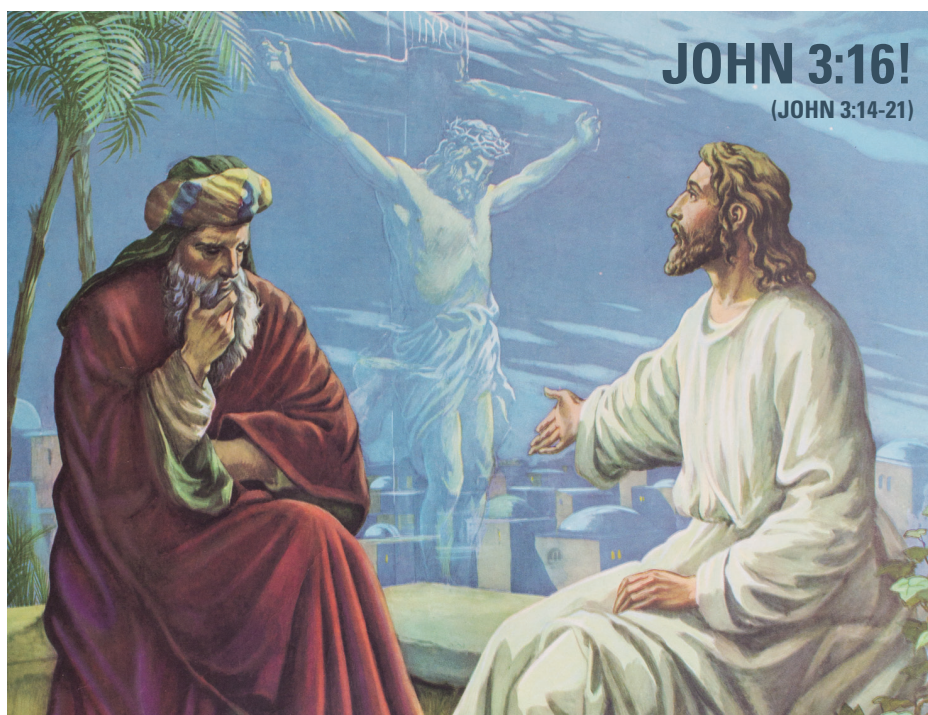


Image of Jesus teaching Nicodemus, from Grace Church Chiangmai, Thailand

Nicodemus is a high-ranking leader within the Jewish community, a member of the Sanhedrin and a *teacher in Israel*. He comes to Jesus under cover of darkness, which indicates his state of mind regarding Jesus and his message.

His difficulty is that he realises that there is something important about Jesus, but he is unable to move beyond his own learning and imagine that God's love and self-revealing could be different – and greater – than his current understanding. He represents the person who wants to believe but who can't, at least at the moment. He is not refusing to believe, and later in the Gospel will find the courage to speak up in the Sanhedrin against the judging of Jesus without due process and finally to assist in the burial of Jesus' crucified body.

We might say that Nicodemus is unable to think outside the box. If he wants to move forward in his understanding of Jesus and what God is offering through Jesus, then he needs to make a decision and to take a leap of faith. At the moment, he is unable to see that the Spirit cannot be contained within the borders of the official teaching and tradition with which he is familiar. His thinking is confined to the things of earth; his faith in Jesus is partial. Once he allows himself to accept the gift of the Spirit from above, then he can be born again.

Today's section of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus begins with the reference to Moses lifting up the bronze serpent during the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan during the Exodus. Jesus will be physically lifted up on the cross: In John's thought, this is the moment of his exaltation: the Israelites who gazed on the serpent were healed of the poisonous bites they had received as punishment; in the same way the person who believes in the revelation of God shown through Jesus' being glorified on the cross will receive eternal life. ■

REFLECT

Sometimes in the crowd at a sporting event you will see a placard held up which reads *John 3:16!* This refers to the verse in today's Gospel which reads "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life." This is often called 'the Gospel in miniature': if most of the New Testament were lost and all we had left were these four short phrases, then we would have the essential Christian message.

God's motive for reaching out to human beings is love, not judgment. This love is universal, it is not restricted to any particular group or institution, which is why John says that God loved *the world* to the extent of sending his Son as a *gift*. A person either accepts or declines a gift, and Nicodemus represents someone who cannot make up his or her mind so takes the parcel and leaves it in the cupboard for the time being. All we are asked to do is to keep an open mind and to allow the Spirit to lead us into a deeper relationship with the Lord. ■

LEARN

The bronze serpent is the means by which Moses, at the Lord's instruction, provides healing for the wounded Israelites during the Exodus journey.

In the Fourth Gospel, the crucifixion is not a painful, ignominious end to Jesus' life but the moment of his exaltation as the Son of God.

There is a play on words throughout John's version of the Gospel on Jesus' *being lifted up* and his *being exalted in glory*.

The judgment we receive depends not on our conduct, that is the sins we commit, but on the decision we make about who Jesus is and his place in our lives.

DO

Write *John 3:16!* on a card or piece of paper. Carry this with you for the next week, and when you notice it, say to yourself the verse from the Gospel.



SAY

God loved the world so much ...