

**March 14, 2021; FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT;
SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON
(50% seating capacity for COVID rules)
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church
Singers: "Praise Team"**

PRELUDE: Rebekah Olson

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 107:1-9

HYMN #20 "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" 9 am: One Voice Hymnal #

OPENING PRAYER: *Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. 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. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen*

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE: Snake on a pole: John 3:14&15

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: *Numbers 21:4-9 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; 5 they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" 6 Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. 7 The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 9 So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.*

EPISTLE LESSON: *Ephesians 2:1-10 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

PASTOR: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under

Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is not, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING

PRAISE SONGS: Krista and Praise Team

**SERMON TITLE: "PERFECT HEALING"
John 3:14-21; Pastor Tom Olson; March 14, 2021**

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

TIMBERLAND: When we were up in Wisconsin, we drove by the little Timberland Church. They had an interesting display out front featuring the Bethlehem stable and the cross with these words: "BORN TO DIE THAT WE MIGHT HAVE LIFE." We are coming close to the end of our journey from Christmas to Good Friday...from Bethlehem to the cross. And what do we find at the end of that journey, defeat? No, we find victory fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, the SEED of the woman had crushed the head of the SERPENT. Let's look at this very familiar passage from John 3 and see how it prepares us for the PERFECT HEALING we find at the cross.

I. THE PLACE OF HEALING *John 3:14-15 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

BRONZE: Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness so that those who simply had the faith to look at it might receive the healing they needed from the deadly serpent's bites. Those serpent bites were the result of sin and unbelief. All sickness and problems are ultimately the result of the fallen, sinful state of the human race. It began in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned and it continues to this day in every person. Each time we disobey God we are proving that we would have done the same thing as Adam and Eve. Our rebellious hearts still reject the goodness of God's perfect law. This sin then produces in us sickness, sorrow and ultimately death. But there is a place we can go for complete restoration to a state of health, happiness and perfection. That place is the cross where God in human flesh paid the price for our sins by his "holy and precious blood and innocent sufferings and death" as the catechism so beautifully explains. Luther goes on in the catechism to tell us why Jesus did this for us when he says, "all this He has done THAT I MIGHT BE HIS OWN..." The place where healing and restoration BEGINS is at the CROSS. The first step is to have faith in Jesus and look and live. Then new life comes to our hearts and healing starts to take place.

CURSED: Galatians 3:10-14 gives us the theology of the cross: "*All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." 11 Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*" The cross is THE PLACE our new life in Christ begins.

II. THE HEART OF HEALING *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."*

LOVE: Our personal reception of new life in Christ begins when we look to Jesus on the cross but it actually is rooted in somewhere else. Our salvation is rooted in the heart of God and flows from him deep, deep love for the fallen human race. God is holy and cannot tolerate sin. God is just and will punish sin. Sin separates us from God. However, God is also the essence of LOVE. I John 4:8 says **"God is love."** God created humans knowing that we would fall away into sin. But it was the only way for God to have friends He could love and who could love Him. God's love was there to find a way to redeem a lost and condemned world. God's love hatched the plan for Christ to take our place on the cross. Just like the ram was the substitute sacrifice in place of Isaac on God's holy mountain, Jesus Christ is the lamb who is our substitute on that same holy mountain. It was Abraham's love for God that made him willing to sacrifice his son. And it is God's love for us that made him willing to sacrifice His son on the cross.

FULNESS: The fulness of eternal life in Christ includes perfect healing in a new and incorruptible body in heaven. Sometimes when we are sick or diseased or dying on earth and we pray for healing and it doesn't come, we can feel we are not loved by God. But we can't base our hope on feelings. We must stand on the Word of God and believe that we are loved, Christ died for us and we have a home in heaven awaiting us free from sin, sorrow, tears, pain and death. When we get to heaven we will be living in perfect health and happiness. This world has plenty of sorrow but in heaven we will only have the love of God and perfect peace. We live by faith now but then we will live by sight and experience.

INEXPRESSIBLE: The hymn writer, F.M. Lehman expresses it this way: "The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell; It goes beyond the highest star, And reached to the lowest hell." ***Romans 5:8 says it this way—"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*** The HEART OF HEALING is the love of God. Every person in the world can rightfully say this, "Someone loved me enough to die for me...His name is Jesus."

III. THE SCOPE OF HEALING *John 3:17&18 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

WORLD: Who does this offer of complete forgiveness, healing and eternal life extend to? The answer is extremely clear, "THE WORLD." If we want to put qualifiers on this we better not because when Jesus was nailed to the cross, he extended forgiveness to those who were crucifying him. One of the great misconceptions about Jesus is that He is the one who condemns sinners and throws them into hell when they die. That is not at all accurate. According to verse 17, ***"God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."*** The world is already condemned by its own sin. But Jesus offers forgiveness to the condemned world resulting in everlasting life in heaven. The only thing that stands between the condemned sinner and eternal life is UNBELIEF. Jesus saves but UNBELIEF condemns.

ISSUE: The sinfulness of the sinner is not the issue. It is the unbelief that is the roadblock. This is exactly what we see in the Old Testament Lesson...all the dying people who were bitten by the snakes had to do is look at the bronze serpent on the pole and they would be healed. LOOK AND LIVE...that was the door to healing and life. The same is true today...look to the cross and live...look away and be lost. Your sins may be very great or very small...that is not the issue. The scope of salvation is the world. God offers salvation to everyone, no matter how bad they have been or are.

IV. THE CHOICE OF HEALING *John 3:19-21 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."*

REJECTED: So now is the time for the jury to render the VERDICT. Who is it then that rejects God's free gift of salvation? It is those who love sin and evil and don't want to come into God's light. It is those who fear their deeds being exposed. There is no question that powerful people in the world today are dabbling in some very evil sins and even seeking the aid of demonic spirits through occult rituals. They have given themselves over to the power of darkness and most of them will never come out of it. They hate the light. They hate people who shine with the light. They love the darkness and they are trying to force it upon the world.

SEEKERS: But there are the others...the seekers. Pastor Mark Antal has found a number of seekers on his motorcycle trip in Florida. He has given away Bibles to hungry souls. He has counselled with a number of hurting veterans. These folks may not be saved but they are seeking the truth and that is the first step. If you want to know the truth, God will find a way to get it to you...even a retired preacher on a Harley Davidson motorcycle! And with the truth comes FREEDOM...the blessed freedom of the new life in Christ. *John 8:31-32 'To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Sometimes God chooses to heal our bodies miraculously, but often times he doesn't, at the moment. That is because the healing we are longing for, perfect healing is for our new and glorified bodies in heaven. Sometimes our way to glorify God is through suffering and not through miracles. But we can say with certainty that God always forgives the sins of those who look to Jesus, dying on the cross for them and who believe that what He did was sufficient. With that forgiveness comes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a "down payment" on the fulness of the promise of perfect healing in heaven. **JESUS WAS BORN TO DIE SO THAT WE MIGHT HAVE LIFE.** Many elderly people who are suffering the pains of worn-out bodies are actually much closer to perfect healing than young people who have strong bodies and no pain. The path to heaven isn't always an easy one. Those last few years of life on earth can be very hard. But it will be worth it all when we see Jesus, as the song says... *"one glimpse of His dear face, all darkness will erase. So bravely run the race, 'till we see Christ."* Amen

Now may the peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #332 "Away in a Manger" (9 AM-)

PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER: *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

BENEDICTION: The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

CLOSING SONG: #21 vs. 4 "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

9 am Recorded "Doxology" #32

POSTLUDE: Rebekah Olson