

God to the Rescue

Good morning, my name is Joseph Klenzmann and I am the deacon intern here at Holy Comforter. Before I start preaching, I would like to give you a little bit of background about myself.

I am a newcomer to Richmond. I have lived here only 15 years. I was born and raised Roman Catholic in central New Jersey.

Church and service to my community has always been an important part of my life. In New Jersey, I was a volunteer firefighter, a fire instructor, here in Richmond, I volunteer as an EMT at Henrico Rescue, and I mention this because it is relevant to my sermon.

So let me begin,

Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them.

Take our minds and think through them.

Take our hearts and set them on fire with love for You, Lord Jesus. Amen.

In today's Gospel, we have perhaps the most widely recognizable phrase from the Bible, John 3:16 "**God so loved the world he sent his only son**" but I am not going to talk about that. Instead, I would like to draw our attention to the readings from the Old Testament and the epistle.

In our first reading, we find the Israelites have just escaped slavery and bondage in Egypt and are in the land of Edom, the wilderness.

In typical Old Testament fashion, they complained. They complained they did not have water, so God provided water. They complained they did not have food, so God provided manna and yet still they complained.

They were impatient for the promise land and complained so much they spoke against God and Moses saying, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt."

Their pride and impatience so upset God he sent poisonous serpents that were biting and the Israelites were dying.

They finally realized that they had in fact sinned against God and they ask Moses for help. Once again, Moses prayed to God and interceded on their behalf asking God to forgive them.

God directs Moses to make an image of a snake and raise it up on a pole, where whoever was bitten by the serpents and was dying, need only look to this symbol and they would be saved.

As an EMT, I am familiar with the symbol. It is the Star of Life. It is the international sign for medical rescue. Ambulances all over the world carry this symbol as a sign that rescue is on its way.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are told that they were dead, because of their sins, and God alone made them alive. Together with Christ by the grace of God saved them. Through faith not by anything that we can do but as a gift from God so that we could be saved and be created in his image for good works.

Earlier in chapter 3 of John's Gospel, we find out that Nicodemus a highly respected Pharisee went to where Jesus was staying under the cover of night, they had a private conversation.

All very secretive, All very hush, hush

Nicodemus probably the only Pharisee who was treated kindly in John's Gospel because he appears to be the only Pharisee who believed that Jesus is a true representative of God.

Imagine that we are there with Jesus and Nicodemus as they are having the conversation. As they are talking, Jesus introduces several new concepts

Like being born again or **And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

Eternal Life? Son of Man? Lifted Up?

Nicodemus must have wondered what is this man talking about. Sadly, he would find out what he meant when Jesus was lifted up on the cross.

Today just as in the time of Moses, and in the time of Nicodemus, there was sin.

For the Israelites, their sin was inpatient and pride.

For the Ephesians, their sins were the passions of the flesh and senses.

For the people who rejected Christ as the messiah, their sin was disbelief.

Let me put it in other terms; they all rejected the salvation that God was offering. This rejection was a cloud that covered them, this rejection made them ashamed.

It kept them in darkness, their pride and impatience was the poison of the snake circulating through their bodies killing them.

Like it or not, every one of us at times has sinned, perhaps not to the level of the Israelites or the Ephesian but we can be impatient, want instant gratification and sometimes reject God.

There have been times where my pride, my disbelief and anger with God has cast a shadow over my relationship with God.

We all have had moments of darkness and of sickness. Times when we felt alone.

These are the moments that we need to call for rescue.

As an EMT, I have been exposed to many strange situations, which generates many stories; you can ask my family, I have many stories.

I would like to share one of my stories with you now.

One night we responded to a single car accident, We found a car had gone off the road and hit a tree, We found an elderly woman behind the wheel with her head down and even though we tried to get a response from her she did not respond, Mam, Mam can you hear me?

Nothing,,, No Response.

Our protocols require an unconscious patient be given an IV and my partner said, "Looks like Someone is getting an IV tonight" At which point her eyes popped wide open and said, "Do you mind I'm trying to pray here".

It would appear she knew in her time of need exactly who to call.

In the moments of darkness, sadness and of sickness, we need to call for help to the only one who could save us. God.

God rescued the Israelites that were dying from their sins. They were told to just look to the bronze snake on a pole and you they will be saved, by that simple act of atonement, that outward sign of faith was all they needed to be saved.

The good news for the Ephesians was, God who is so merciful brought them and us back from the death of sin, made us alive together with Christ by the grace of God and saved through faith.

The good news for the believers of Jesus. If they only believed, they would be saved from eternal death. By coming to the light, their deeds can be seen as doing God's work.

Christ saved the world, from death, from the darkness, from the cold barren wasteland of faithlessness and isolation. By that simple act of faith of looking to the Christ on the cross they were saved, they moved into the light salvation.

However, here is the good news for us, and there is always good news God for us.

God offers the same salvation to us today...

If I take my metaphor of God as the rescuer, a little further all we have to do is call for salvation and have faith that help is on its way. Instead of calling 9-1-1, we call G-O-D.

Just as my woman in the car accident did.

Salvation is a gift from God. According to the Book of Common Prayer. "we are accorded righteousness before God. Only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by faith and not for our own works or desires".

It has always amazed me how relevant the lessons are for people today as they were for the people thousands of years ago. It is a reminder that perhaps society has not advanced as much as we would like to think.

Today we have the same ability, to do wonderful things, to live in the light doing God's work as our ancestors did.

Like our ancestors, we have the same tendency to stumble and fall, to hurt, to be alone, to be isolated from God, to be in the dark.

We have the same opportunity for salvation, to be rescued by the Holy Comforter.

God the dispatcher “so love the word he sent his only son” Jesus to save us from eternal death.

God dispatches the Holy Spirit today to strengthen us, to comfort us when we are hurt and broken and in need of rescue.

However, Salvation comes with responsibilities.

It means that we all are called to be first responders.

We are all called to be good Samaritans.

We all have a duty to our Creator to use the gifts that we were given. To help the less fortunate like our food pantry, protect our planet, like installing a rain garden and shelter our neighbor when they are in need like CARITAS.

I pray that we take this time during this Lenten season to look back at our lives and see how often we have been saved and rescued by God.

That we have been rescued by the Grace of God and not by our own doing.

That we all find ways to first respond to those in need of rescue.

Salvation is waiting for us, all we have to do is believe that when we call and atone for our trespasses God the Holy Comforter and Rescuer is on the way.

Amen