

**Saint Peter's**  
**Lent 4 2024**  
**The Son of Man Lifted Up**  
**Num 21.4-9, Ps 107, Eph 2.1-10, Jn 3.14-21**

Please be seated.

Well good morning. It's a pleasure to be with you today. Thank you for coming to church today on this hot morning.

Let us pray as we come to God's word:

'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
be acceptable to you,  
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.  
Amen'.

'The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and the universe proclaims his handiwork.'

Proclaims the psalmist. Who then goes on from the glory of God to the glory of God's law, the ten commandments.

'The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the Lord are sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;  
the fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,

even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

So let me ask you, 'How does God's law taste, on your lips?'

God's law was given to us, with a view to life. To the preservation of the human race. God's law is good for us. There can be no human community, when human beings turn their back on God, take idols for themselves, take the name of God in vain, dishonour their parents, murder, steal, slander, betray their marriages, covet, desire.

The Apostle summed up the law in the one commandment: you shall not desire. And the Church since Augustine has defined sin as desire.

Desire orients itself to what God has forbidden. It deceives us humans by making us think that we know better than God. It tells us that the commandment is bad for us, that it diminishes life. So that by setting aside the command, we will live a richer and fuller life. And there in lies its power over us. Its power is its deception. In its power to deceive us, desire turns us humans against God's commands. It turns us against God.

Imagine an ordinary plant. The bit above the ground, the bit you can see, is desire. The bit below the ground, the bit you can't see, is pride. Pride is the root of human desire.

Pride is self-centredness. It is human beings, putting themselves, in the place of God. In the place that belongs to God alone. In the kingdom of the world, human beings put themselves at the centre. In the kingdom of God, human beings are put in their proper place.

The love of self, leads to the hatred of God. In competition with God, for all knowledge and all power to judge, it inevitably fails in the attempt. The failed self, the failed human being, hates God. So that in the end, human pride, leads to hatred of God.

I remember as a boy watching TV at home. When a scary bit came on, I had to turn away. Or I would watch, through clenched fingers, in front of my face to protect me.

The life of the Australian community is a bit like that today. It's hard to watch.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ are not condemned: but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

A former parishioner of mine in a previous parish was Marjorie. At the tender age of 108, Marjorie once turned to me and said, 'My friends and I have come to the conclusion that at some point we've taken a wrong turn as a nation. That we're now on the wrong track. We need to turn around, and go back. We need to turn around, and go back to God.'

In the Old Testament, every person who looked up to the serpent lifted up on the pole, lived.

In the New Testament, every person who looks up to Jesus Christ, lifted up on the cross, lives.

The man Jesus was tempted, as we are tempted.

He was like us in every way, except this.

Unlike every other human being, Jesus was without sin.

He was the one truly innocent human being.

So why did he suffer and die?

Why was he condemned, as a guilty man?

If not for himself, then for who?

The answer, of course, is for you and me.

And for the human race.

Jesus, in his death, is the Christ.

God's once for all sacrifice for human sins.

His sacrifice removes the sin, the guilt, the consequences.

In Jesus Christ, we are set free.

In Jesus Christ, God has begun again.

We are a new creation, in the midst of the old.

We are a new humanity, in this world of Adam.

In Jesus Christ, the new day has dawned.

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent, and believe in the good news,' Jesus proclaimed.

What the law could not do, because of sin, God has done in Jesus Christ.

The one, innocent man, who was lifted up on the cross, once, for all people, is lifted up, today, above the ongoing political order of this world.

So that every political order must serve him. Must serve the law of Moses. 'For truly, I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.' Jesus said.

The law is there, the state is there, in partial fulfilment of the universal human need for community, for the preservation of human life, to curb evil, and to proclaim the final future fulfilment of the human race in the future of the kingdom of God.

But all who are in Christ, are no longer subject to the state, or to the law.

Our life is now hidden in Christ. His kingdom is above, this sceptred sway.

As new human beings in Christ, by His Spirit, however, we are not left alone in matters of moral conduct.

We receive apostolic petition. Apostolic petition, of what it means to be a new human being in Jesus Christ. Revealing as it does what it means to be a new human being in Christ. Leading to a common lifestyle within the church, in harmony with the commands of God. And whose only authority, is Jesus Christ himself.

In Jesus Christ, and by his death, we are, all of us:

Free at last.

Free at last.

Alleluia, we're free at last!

Rev'd Jonathan Chamberlain  
Vicar