

**John 3:14-21**

**Lent 4; March 10-11, 2024**

Chris Gursky and his wife were on vacation in the Swiss Alps in October of 2018. He was a Florida-based vehicle parts manager and photographer. He and his wife decided to give hang-gliding a try. It was one of those things that he had always wanted to try. His wife had the same thoughts. They had never been hang-gliding. After all, what a more beautiful setting than the Swiss Alps to give it a try? His wife took off first with her pilot. Her husband watched as she took. He thought it looked so cool. Shortly after her departure, it was his turn to follow her. His pilot strapped him up with a harness. They waited for a few minutes for a good updraft wind so that they could take off from the 4,000 ft. mountain edge.

He was expecting to level out above the pilot after they took off. He soon realized that somehow the pilot had not connected the harness to the hang glider or the pilot. Suddenly, his grand adventure turned into a terrifying fight for survival, desperately holding on to the hang-glider and his instructor leg. For the next 2 minutes and 14 seconds hung on for his life. If you watch the video, you will also see the instructor trying to get back to the ground as fast as he could. He is seen desperately searching for a safe place to land amidst the mountainous terrain. Gursky later says: *"I remember looking down and thinking, 'This is it.'" Yet, somehow, the pilot did hold on to Gursky till they landed. His miracle flight, which ended with a 45 mph "hot landing," a broken wrist and a torn bicep. When later asked if he would try it again, he said: "Still can't cross hang gliding off the bucket list till I finish with a successful flight. I will go hang gliding again as I did not get to enjoy my first flight."*

Life seems like that sometimes, doesn't it? We don't know how we can get through it. Yet, even though it was the pilot's fault for not securing the harness, he was not going to let his passenger die. Jesus is not going to let the people of this world die. He was going to do whatever it took to take us safely to our landing sight in heaven. Throughout this season of Lent, we have seen that being a sinner in a broken world, has its challenges. We will face temptations, distractions and crosses. Yet, God lifts up our eyes to see the love shown in his gift of His Son. God will not let you go. He has handcuffed himself to you in love. He owns the only key. You don't need to *win* his love. You already *have* his love in Jesus.

***"<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."***

Those are familiar words to us. But if you think about those words outside of having faith in Jesus, they don't make any sense, do they. Why would God do that? Why would Jesus even come? After all, the people of this world don't want to follow God by nature. After all, we don't always want to trust God. It's so easy to have it happen. Look at the children of Israel in our first lesson for today. God had rescued his people from Egypt in a miraculous way. Yet, what soon happens? ***"But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!'"*** God would punish his people with sending poisonous snakes into their camp to bring them to repentance. Yet, God would give them a promise that really doesn't make sense. ***"Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." 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, they lived."***

There was a man named Nicodemus in our Gospel lesson this morning who comes to see Jesus. Having performed the miracle at the wedding in Cana and cleared the temple at the time of the Passover, Jesus has a conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus wants to shift the focus miracles to the heart of the issue. When Nicodemus has a hard time understanding rebirth and the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus takes him back to Israel's history. ***"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."***

God wants his people to completely trust him. Even if, the solution seems a little bit odd. You might ask just ask the question: *Why didn't God just kill the snakes?* The root of the problem with the snakes is that they stopped trusting God. They wanted to swap roles with God. In many ways, that's what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. They wanted to tell God that we can think, eat, say, do, trust anything we want. They thought that they knew better than God. The children of Israel felt the same way in the wilderness. They thought they could provide better than God. They stopped trusting God. Their friendship with their Maker died. That same death was brought to Nicodemus is brought to us.

So, we have a problem. We think that we have to try to fix this problem of sin. It doesn't take long to figure out that we can't. Jesus wants us to know that the solution can only be found in him. **"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."** Jesus' solution seems so simple. It's a *gift* from God. In our minds, the thought of *work* sounds better. In almost every other aspect of life, we get better things by work. There has to be more than John, chapter 3. The simplicity troubles people. We expect a more elaborate solution for sin. Moses and children of Israel expected a more elaborate solution for the poisonous snakes. A bronze snake on a pole? Salvation found by the Son of God dying on a pole.

Really? John 3:16 is it. God says: *Trust me!* Trust what you cannot do on your own. That's why God sent his Son: **"For God so loved..."** He loved the world. He gave this world the free gift of his one and only Son. That's what his love looks like. And the purpose of giving this gift? Our salvation.

When the instructor of Chris Gursky hung on to him, he *hoped* to bring his passenger safely down. For 2 minutes and 14 seconds, both the pilot and Chris didn't know for sure if that would happen. When God holds on to us for the few years or many years of our life, there is no *"hope"* in his promises. There is certainty. It's absolute certainty. In a world that is full of so much uncertainty, isn't it great to have this gift of certainty and eternal life? It's ours in Jesus. He gives us victory over all the challenges of lift. May we join the hymn writer in saying:

*When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun.  
Amen.*