Mired in Sin in Sunday’s Readings, and a Reason to Rejoice.

Lent 4 Mothering Sunday 14th March 2021

Numbers 21. 4-9

Psalm 107. 1-3, 17-22

Ephesians 2. 1-10

John 3. 14-21

If you are fearful and wandering about in a wilderness, it must be pretty tempting to wonder quite whom you can trust. The Israelites become boringly predictable in their carping and lack of trust in both Moses and God and, of course, they also complain about the food. When reminded of their vulnerability by the biting of snakes, they soon turn back to Moses and repent, acknowledging their sinfulness, and the serpent of bronze becomes their focus for healing.

By way of an echo, the Psalmist portrays the people made ill by their sin, so they cry to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivers them out of their distress, and they offer their thanksgiving and shout for joy.

St Paul portrays the state of sinfulness as death itself, not being or becoming alive. It is the work of God in his redeeming love in his Son to bring us to life, through the death on the cross, and raised with him in his resurrection. God shows ‘the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.’

In the gospel reading, our Lord takes us to new heights and new depths. So far the range of human sinfulness has been about lack of faith, the repetitive and tedious failings we all have, the neglect of others, lack of vision and imagination, sins venial rather than mortal. Nicodemus has already asked his question before our selected passage begins: ‘how can a man be born again?’ Birth by water and the Spirit is the key to unlock the way to the kingdom of God. It is implicit that Jesus if offering that way to Nicodemus, if he will respond to the challenge of understanding that the way to life is through our Lord and through the cross. And then one of the best-known quotations, ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life’. Almost as well known is ‘God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him’. The old name for this Sunday was *Laetare,* Latin for Rejoice. The message is clear, God loves the world, and so must we, promoting welfare, happiness and fulfilment for everyone. Only those who practice, promote and profit from evil are unable to share in this rejoicing. This is the sin, mortal sin, which is committed with intent to harm, damage, destroy. Evil kills love, trust and hope. Sin indeed.

Time to hold in our prayers and support from our wallets the mothers of Syria and Lebanon and their sufferings under evil tyrants, many abandoned by men who rightly fear persecution or recruitment. Time to give thanks for our own family life, the women who have built our families and our nation by so many sacrifices in peace and war. Time to value the leadership and gifts of women leaders in so many areas of life, and also time to remember the women who suffer violence. And time to pray that evildoers may repent.

So sorry, ladies, that we cannot give you daffodils (yet again) this year. The image above is the best we can do. Passiontide begins next Sunday, and the hope is that we may be able to gather in church on Palm Sunday. Have a good week, Barry