

Mar. 10, 2024
Fourth Sunday in Lent
Num 21:4-9, Eph. 2:1-10, John 3:14-21
“The Only Cure for Sin-bite ”

When the wind and the snow blow hard and cold in January and February, it's easy for people to think, “I gotta get out of here” and so the urge to sit on some beach with blue skies and sparkling warm waters becomes a very attractive option.

But, people forget that sitting on the beach with your legs covered with sand attracts mosquitos and sand flies, and if you don't put repellent on, then suddenly you notice all the bites on your legs and then the itching and scratching and pretty soon your reaching for the camomile lotion.

But there is another predator out there, whose bite is eternally deadly, worse than any sand fly or mosquito, and every one of us here has been bitten by it. That is sin, so now it's time to receive some medical education before it is too late as our sermon theme is entitled: “The Only Cure For Sin-Bite.”

Grumbling and Complaining. We do it quite regularly. “Boy, I hope we have an early Spring with lots of rain so our wells fit up” “Boy, I hope the bank rates don't sky rocket, how will I ever pay my mortgage?” “Boy, the price of food keeps going up, how am I ever going to manage?”

It seems that all of our grumbling and complaining resemble a group of Israelites who lived around 1500 B.C. In a way, I guess we can probably sympathize with them because they had been on the road for 40 years!

A journey that should have only taken months was stretched into decades because of their grumbling and complaining. Now they were approaching the land of Canaan.

All they had to do was go through the land of the Edomites but they refused them passage through their country and so the Israelites, who had already been on a long trek had to go even further around the Edomites' land.

Can you blame them if they had become a little impatient? Wouldn't you have acted any differently? For 40 years, the Israelites had the same diet day after day. Even though the Lord miraculously provided manna during the morning and quail in the evening for them to eat and they never had to worry about food...yet they still complained.

Our Scripture reading records their complaining whining words, "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!"

Imagine for a moment if you are God and you give, free of charge, food, to two million people so that they can eat every day for 40 years, and then they think that's not good enough? How would you feel if you were God?

You see God is not just some impersonal force out there. He is a real being who has real feelings and how human beings act, affects God, and as a result God was saddened by this ingratitude on the part of the children of Israel.

He had feelings of anger and yet, amazingly, the Lord also harbored feelings of love toward these people who were rejecting him. He wanted to find a way to get them to appreciate Him and love Him.

Like the Israelites, we sometimes sadden God and anger God by our lack of appreciation for His gifts to us. For example, God has given you a nice home to live in, but you look at other people living in bigger houses and want that.

The Lord gives you a car to drive, a real blessing when you see some people having to walk or bike to work, and yet that vehicle just isn't quite as nice as you want.

Sometimes when we say these things, aren't we saying, "we detest this miserable food that you give us, God!"? and like the Israelites, sometimes the Lord will send us something to shake us up a bit.

But then again, these can be good things because they turn us around. They get us re-focused on what's really important. So sending these snakes was His solution to the problem.

Hardships can help us realize the many blessings that the Lord has already given us. God's solution to the Israelites' sin had another profound effect of them: it foreshadowed the sending of their Savior who would also be lifted up on a pole.

You see, this story isn't so much about God punishing the Israelites as it is Him providing an escape from the punishment. The Israelites realized that they were in the wrong.

They came to Moses and confessed, "we sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us." and so the Lord instructed Moses how to rid the Israelites of this punishment.

It was so easy. Moses simply made a snake out of bronze metal. He placed this snake up on a pole, which probably had some sort of crossbar to hold the snake, and the way to avoid the effects of the snake poison was to simply look at the bronze snake. If you looked at that bronze snake on the pole, you wouldn't die.

We have an excellent illustration for sin in this snake story. Think about how a snake will bite a person, and then the glands that hold the poison simultaneously pump the venom through the teeth into the body. Sin is like the bite of the snake. It strikes us, but then it injects its venom into our system.

Listen to these chilling words from James 1. "But each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

Think of King David, bitten by a lust for Bathsheba, and then the venom found its way into his system. He committed adultery with her, and even murdered her husband, and then kept this sin to himself for almost a year.

What did Adam and Eve do after sinning against the Lord in the Garden? They foolishly tried to hide from God, and then Adam accused his wife Eve of leading him astray. Sin is so destructive because it leads to eternal death and punishment.

And what are the consequences of not having God's cure for sin? You know the words from John 3:16. It says that "whoever does not believe is condemned." Sin brings death into the world.

The Lord told Adam and Eve, the day that they rebelled against Him, they would die. And it's true, our bodies start to break down, our hair turns gray, our joints creak, our teeth fall out, as we slowly begin to break down and die.

Romans 6 says, "The wages of sin is death." In addition to physical death, there is the problem of eternal death, eternal separation from God, what the Bible calls condemnation. Romans 5 says of all people, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death all to all men, because all have sinned."

The bite of sin is so nasty because of how it twists our thinking. Jesus said to Nicodemus, light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

When it comes to the free gift of forgiveness and the free cure for sin that Jesus offers, people many times stubbornly cling to their good works, or think they need to let Jesus do his part but it is still up to them to do their part. "I'll try and do my best and hope in luck for all the rest." Light comes into the world, and yet people prefer the darkness of sin, and the false hope of saving themselves to what Jesus freely offers.

Thank God, the cure we have for sin, does not have anything mixed into it that depends on what I can produce and provide. It is entirely something God carefully works out and then administers for me.

Sometimes we are amazed at how certain medicines today can reduce high blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and lower anxiety. We stand in awe of what an aspirin can do for the heart and inflammation and pain and headache.

But nothing compares to the cure that God planned for us from all eternity. It is based on God giving us his Son. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

God loves the world. He loves all these people even those who have been bitten by sin and who want to continue to be bitten by sin and then think they can cure themselves. He loves them all by giving up His Son to be the cure. The cure is amazing. Jesus was lifted up on a cross the way Moses lifted up the snake in the desert.

Listen to how this cure is described in 2 Corinthians 5 where it says, "God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God."

The cure was so amazing because every sin ever committed was taken by Jesus upon himself. He became sin for us who knew no sin. He took the sin, paid for it, and removed it.

In John 15 Jesus says we are clean through the Word he has spoken to us. On the cross he cried out, "It is finished!" The cure was complete. God shows us that getting to heaven is so easy. We don't follow a prescribed set of laws and rules.

To get to heaven we simply look with our eyes of faith to the cross. And as we look at the cross, we see God's solution to the poison of sin that is coursing through our veins.

Yes, God could have punished the Israelites in some other way when they grumbled. But there was a reason He disciplined the way that He did. He needed to teach his people to appreciate what they had.

He needed to give His people a sign about how all their spiritual problems would eventually be taken care of. As far as forgiveness goes, all of our sins are already nailed to the cross. Look to the cross, and live! That's the only cure for sin-bite. May God bless you and keep you in Jesus name we pray. Amen