

Look Up and Live

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.” (Eph 2:8). By grace, through faith. So what did that look like for God’s people in the Old Testament? Well, in our Old Testament lesson for today, it looked like this:

God’s people were travelling through desert. Their journey was not an easy one; they certainly had tough days. But God was blessing them the whole way. God blessed them with protection; he kept their enemies away – they lived in relative safety. God blessed them with food to eat every day; he showered down manna from heaven. And God met all their physical needs; throughout their forty years of traveling in desert, their clothes and shoes never wore out. Every day they received blessings from God, as he protected them, fed them, and took care of their needs.

But these people became ungrateful. They criticized God and complained about their blessings. They said that God wasn’t taking care of them well enough – like he didn’t know what he was doing. They spent so much time focusing on what they didn’t have that they lost sight of the wonderful blessings they did have.

So along came the snakes. They had never seen snakes like this before. These snakes inflicted pain and suffering on the people. Their lives became miserable; their lives were falling apart because of these snakes: families were torn apart, people were fighting each other, chaos was everywhere. Everyone got bit, and the poison was spreading quickly. And people were dying left and right because of these snakes; in fact, before long they all were going to die. You could call their situation hopeless.

But God had a plan to save the people. He didn’t have to save them; he wasn’t required to. But grace moved him – grace! Remember: grace is God’s undeserved love for sinners. And here’s what God’s grace moved him to do. He took a big, long piece of wood, and on one end he stuck a snake. It was a bronze snake, so it was very precious. He lifted that snake on that pole way up high so that everyone could see it. No one could miss it; it was in plain sight for everyone to see. And, really, it was an ugly sight – no one wants to look at a snake, even if it is bronze. Nevertheless, this snake, raised up on this pole, was God’s grace.

And God’s grace was for everyone. Everyone who looked up at that snake was healed. Everyone who believed that that snake on that pole was the only answer to their prayers; everyone who trusted in God’s grace lifted up high for all to see, was completely cured. Poison gone; life restored; hope for a future! Just by looking! God said, “Look up and live!” And that’s just what they did.

By grace, through faith. What did that look like in the Old Testament? A snake lifted high on a wooden pole healing sickness and taking away disease – that’s called grace. Looking up at that snake and trusting in God’s healing grace – that’s called faith.

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.” By grace, through faith. So what does that look like for God’s people today, people like us, at St. John’s Lutheran Church, Burlington, Wisconsin, March, 2016? Well, it looks like this:

God’s people still travel through the desert of this life. Our journey is not an easy one; we certainly have tough days. But God blesses us the whole way. God blesses us with protection; he keeps our enemies away – in Burlington we live in relative safety. God blesses us with food to eat every day; he showers down meals and means so that we don’t go hungry. And God meets all our physical needs; as we travel through this life God blesses us with clothes and shoes, houses and cars, toys and joys, and all kinds of things. Every day we receive blessings from God, as he protects us and feeds us and takes care of our needs.

But we sometimes become ungrateful. We criticize God and complain about our blessings. We say that God isn’t taking care of us well enough – like he doesn’t know what he’s doing. We spend so much time focusing on what we don’t have that we lose sight of the wonderful blessings we do have.

So along comes the Snake. We’ve seen this Snake before; it’s the same Snake that bit Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This Snake inflicts pain and suffering on us, as well. Our lives have become miserable; our lives are falling apart because of this snake: families are torn apart, people are fighting each other, chaos is everywhere. Every one of us has been bitten by this Snake, and the poison has spread quickly. And people are dying left and right because of this Snake; in fact, before long we’re all going to die. You could call our situation hopeless.

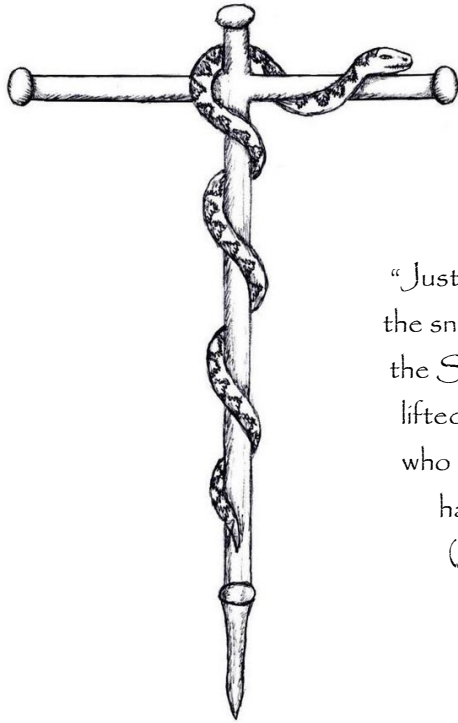
But God had a plan to save us. He didn’t have to save us; he wasn’t required to. But grace moved him – grace! Remember: grace is God’s undeserved love for sinners. And here’s what God’s grace moved him to do. He took a big, long piece of wood, and on one end he stuck his Son. This was God’s Son, so he was very precious. God lifted his Son on that cross way up high so that everyone could see him. No one could miss him; he was in plain sight for everyone to see. And, really, he was an ugly sight – no one wants to look at someone being crucified, even if it is God’s Son. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ, raised up on a cross, is God’s grace.

And God’s grace is for everyone. Everyone who looks up at Jesus is healed. Everyone who believes that Jesus Christ on that cross is the only answer to our prayers; everyone who trusts in God’s grace lifted up high for all to see, is completely cured. Satan’s poison gone; lives restored; hope for an eternal future! Just by looking! God said, “Look up and live!” And so that’s just what we do.

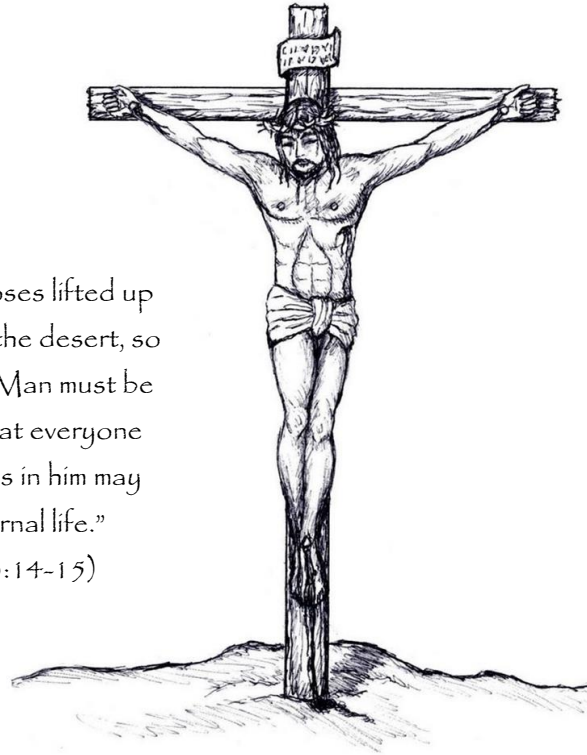
By grace, through faith. What does that look like for us today? Jesus Christ lifted high on a wooden cross healing spiritual sickness and taking away sin – that’s called grace. Looking up at Jesus and trusting in his healing grace – that’s called faith.

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.” Or to put it another way, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 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” (Jn 3:14-16).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, look up and live! That’s what believers do – whether it’s a snake on a pole or Christ on a cross. Look up and live! God’s grace gives; faith receives – by grace, through faith. Look up and live! Amen.



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the snake in the desert, so
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(John 3:14-15)



Numbers 21:4-9

⁴They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; ⁵they 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!”

⁶Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

⁸The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” ⁹So 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.