

**God's Way of Salvation**  
**March 5, 2023**

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

John 3:16—"For God so loved the World that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"—this is one of the most well-known verses of the Bible. It helps us to understand what Jesus came to do, which is to save us.

On what we call Good Friday, He willingly went to the cross to die for all our sins. He rose again on the Easter morning and later ascended into heaven. How do we know this? By the accounts of the eyewitnesses who were there, and who ensured that it was written down for us. And yet ever since then, because people are people, many have wondered: if Jesus overcame death and the grave, then why do I have to die?

To help us understand and provide a little more background to our Gospel reading for today, I want to start by reminding you of the Book of Numbers in the Old Testament. It is there, in Chapter 21, that the children of Israel were wandering for 40 years out in the desert. During that time, God taught them to listen to His Word and trust that He would provide for their needs.

But they were slow in learning His lessons, and they were even rebellious. They did not honor God like Abram once did as he followed God throughout the land. They were more concerned with themselves and their comfort, and were not satisfied with what God provided for them. They even said to Moses, “Why have you brought us out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food” (Numbers 21:4b-5). Hearing this, God sent fiery serpents among them. And those serpents bit them and many died. It was as St. Paul would later write in Romans, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a).

But, when the children of Israel went to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us,” Moses saw their repentance—how they had turned away from their impatient grumbling and complaining. And he saw that they had become all too aware of their sins—how they had sinned against him, and more importantly, how they had sinned against God.

So, seeing their great need, Moses prayed to God on their behalf. And in return, God gave Moses instructions: “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (Numbers 21:8). And Moses did because he believed in God, and he believed in God’s plan to save the people. And while God did not send the serpents away, He provided a way out of death and led them to salvation. And even though they might get bitten, it would not kill them, because whoever looked at the bronze serpent IN FAITH lived.

This was the example that Jesus used to help Nicodemus understand how God works. He does not take away death but sends His Son into that world that is full of death, so that He might die in our place: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:15). And while it might be hard for us to believe, we do so with eyes of faith. Because Jesus was handed over to sin, death, and Satan, that we have eternal life.

We have sinned—in thought word, and deed. We have been impatient. We have grumbled and complained about that which God has provided for us. We need to repent of our sins, but so often we simply continue in them. That is until God does something to get our attention.

God knows that you have sinned against Him. And He also knows when you humbly confess your sins and turn from them. He knows when you pray for His forgiveness as well as your need for redemption. And it is my pleasure to share with you that He has answered your prayer and provided you a way. Because Jesus is the one who took all the punishment that you deserve, and not only provides you forgiveness but also gives you the eternal life.

And today, even though we might continue to suffer from the effects of sin and physical death, we also know that God loves us. When we get sick, injured, or things do not work out the way that we expect, because the serpent is still biting at our heels, we know that Jesus has crushed the head of that old evil

foe. And by His death on the cross, our Lord has destroyed death, so that what we endure and suffer now is the aftereffects of an enemy that has lost and only wants us to drag us down with him. But our Resurrected Lord is so much greater than all that!

And as a baptized child of God, you are Christ's. Satan cannot truly harm you, because God did not send His one and only Son into this world to condemn or eternally shame you for your sins: "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." That is His plan for you and for all people loved by God.

God loves you so much that He wants to save you, heal you, comfort you, love you, and give you hope, so that you know no matter how many times that serpent might bite you, you might lift up your eyes to the Cross of Christ and believe with your whole heart that Jesus died for you. You are a child of God, who is able to look with eyes of faith at that Cross and find that even though we might die a physical death, He gives us a real, abundant life that has no end. Why? Because He is the beginning and the end of all life—He is alpha and the omega—who has traded His life for you, that you might have life in Him both now and always. This is Our Savior's Way.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.