

Ophidiophobia / Cross



It's a great privilege and joy to live here on land cared for by the Gundungurra and Darug peoples.

We recognise and honour the elders, past, present and emerging of this beautiful country that we call home, and upon which we Leura Uniting Church worship and meet. (silence)

Psalm 107:1,2

Give thanks to the Lord because he is Good; his love is eternal!

Repeat these words in praise to the Lord,

All you whom he has saved

Opening prayer of Adoration

Prayer of Confession

God of all mercy, give us grace today to make a fresh start. We know we have not loved you with our whole heart, Nor have we loved our neighbour as ourselves As we hope to be forgiven, teach us how to forgive: And lead us forward in a new life where neither grudges nor resentment have a part; Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Numbers 21:4-9

⁴From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food⁶ Then the Lord sent fiery serpents

among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ And the people came 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." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze ^[a] serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live

John3:14-21

¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ^[a]¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him." ^[b] ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

TIS 53 Come, sing praises to the Lord above

1. Come, sing praise to the Lord above,
rock of our salvation, God of love;
with delight into God's presence move
for the Lord our God is King!

*God is King above the mountains high,
the ocean deep , the land and sky;
mighty continents and islands lie
within the hollow of God's hand.*

*God is King above the mountains high,
the ocean deep, the land and sky;
mighty continents and islands lie
within the hollow of God's hand.*

4. Forty years God kept the prize away,
made them wander until they would obey,
exiled all of them until the day
they would honour God as King.

3. Hear the story of God's people now,
you with stubborn hearts who will not bow;
learn what happened long ago and how
God can show you who is King.

*God is King above the mountains high,
the ocean deep , the land and sky;
mighty continents and islands lie
within the hollow of God's hand.*

Michael Arnold Perry
1942-96

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Message Ross Neville

Ophidiophobia

Possibly 36% of people suffer from this!

Do you know what this is? A fear or phobia about snakes, How many of you fit into this category?

Do you have any snake stories?

Have you seen the movie 'Snakes on a Plane,' Seen the character Indiana Jones who is notorious for his fear and dislike of snakes, and this trait seems to slip into many a scene in the classic trilogy.

Reflect on one of your own experiences with snakes.

What sort of cure for healing is told to the Israelites. 'Look at the statue of the thing you are afraid of or the thing that caused your illness or death of family members.' If you do that and believe, you will be healed you will be made well.

Surely traumatic! Psychological it could be helpful! Face the thing you are afraid of and find healing.

Why did Moses do this to the people of Israel?

You might ask yourself the same question about why God wants us to focus on the cross for salvation and healing.

The cross is one of the most cruel and merciless way of killing another person any culture ever devised. It could epitomise agonising death, the conquest of evil in the society.

A person was usually stripped naked because the crucified person will begin to lose control of their bladder and bowels. They are then nailed or tied to a cross beam, legs nailed or tied to the upright, If you wanted to extend the pain nail their legs one each side of the of the upright pole and/or give them a small footpad under their feet. The person would take 1 -3 days to die, usually of asphyxiation when their lungs begin to collapse.

Why does God expect us to focus on the cross with Jesus lifted up on such a gross life terminating article?

Because what happened on the cross, means a lot of things to those who believe in what happened.

We are saved from normal death,

We can be given a new life. God is offering us healing;

God is offering his love to be a guide for our life on earth;

God is fulfilling his promise to his people, proving he keeps his promises.

God is proving he is cosmic.

What did Moses tell the Israelites to do?

"If you see a snake look him straight in the eyes. Stare him down. See who blinks first." It sounds kind of crazy but at some level that's exactly what God told the Israelites to do.

God's remedy reveals that the wilderness serpent is both the agent of death and the agent of healing.

The cross of death is now the cross of life. God says,

"Look at it. Look at the very thing you fear, the thing that bites, terrorizes, and kills you, the death you will face."

Those are the places in which Jesus Christ stands victorious. God does not remove the dangers and difficulties of life. Instead, God offers a remedy and a way forward. "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

The people beg Moses to intercede, and he does, and God, rather than removing the snakes, sends a cure for snakebite.

They'll still get bitten; that danger doesn't go away, although God does offer healing if they look in the right direction.

God's provision of healing in this passage is instructive. Even in our worst failures and disappointments, God provides. God offers healing for our wounds, relationship for our loneliness, and faithfulness for our faithlessness. God doesn't remove the sources of our suffering, but God makes the journey with us, providing what we most deeply need, if we but look in the right direction.

God does not give the people what they ask for. They want Moses to get God to "take away the serpents from us" (Numbers 21:7). But the serpents do not go away, nor do they stop biting. Instead, God instructs Moses on how to heal the people who are bitten; they are still bitten, but they live.

Deliverance does not come in the way that they expect.

Similarities between the stories of Moses and the Israelites and us today. People are in danger of death because of their sin.

God provides the agent of salvation—the bronze serpent in the first story and the Son of Man in the second.

The agent of salvation is lifted up. The people are saved by looking at—or believing in—God's agent of salvation. A healer, a guide, a friend, our creator, who loves us.

Like the staff, the cross proclaims God's solidarity with a suffering world. To hear those familiar words from John's gospel in tandem with this referenced text in Numbers enriches its meaning. It reminds us that God loved *this* world, this messed up world, full of snakes, a suffering world with all of its sin and pain.

That it was to *this* wilderness of a world that God sent Jesus Christ, that we might lift our eyes and see love.

That, message in the midst of the wilderness, is good news. Especially when snakes are involved

commemoration of the "International Women's Day" would prompt us to consider the places of inequality that still exist in our world and the disproportionate violence committed against women. Whether globally, nationally, locally, or personally, we are surrounded by snakes that are poisoning peoples lives.

Like the staff, the cross proclaims God's solidarity with a suffering world. reminds us that God loved *this* world, this messed up, full of snakes, suffering world with all of its sin and pain. That it was to *this* wilderness of a world that God sent Jesus Christ, that we might lift our eyes and see love.

Whatever the snaky places of your life are today, the gospel promise is that there is an antidote to the venom, a healing for every bite, a life for every death. There is hope in the midst of despair, forgiveness in the midst of sin, reconciliation in the midst of brokenness, strength in the midst of weakness, light in the midst of darkness.

Notices

Prayer for our Offering Money Time Talents

TIS 638 O Christ the healer

1. O Christ, the healer, we have come
to pray for health, to plead for friends.
How can we fail to be restored
when reached by love that never ends?

5. Grant that we all, made one in faith,
in your community may find
the wholeness that, enriching us,
shall reach the whole of mankind.

4. In conflicts that destroy our health
we diagnose the world's disease;
Our common life declares our ills:
is there no cure, O Christ for these?

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Fred Pratt Green

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Prayers of the People 15/3/2021.

Based on a prayer by Rev. Kate Dunn from Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church New York.

Gracious and loving God,
be our guide on this journey of Lent.
Open our ears to hear your words of challenge and your words of grace.
Open our hearts to love all that you would have us love:
our families, our friends, our neighbours, our enemies,
strangers in our midst,
this beautiful planet that is our home, and all living things.

Jesus, our friend,
we pray for the courage and wisdom
to follow you in our daily lives,
so that the distractions that are always present with us:
such as our anxieties, physical and emotional struggles, financial worries,
challenging relationships, grief over loss of loved ones,
and fears about our own mortality,
will not have the power to push us off your path.

Help us to stay focused on your love,
the fact that you loved us so much that you came to be one of us,
that you do not remove yourself from us, but walk beside us,
and dwell within us, our creator, our redeemer, our hope.

Holy spirit, we trust in your presence here with us,
and your presence throughout the world.
We know there are many, many places where people suffer
through illness, loneliness, addiction,
natural disaster, war, famine, grief,
cruelty, violence and systemic injustice.
Give us courage to bear witness to suffering,
and guide us to respond with compassion and faith
through our resources, our prayers, our words, and our actions.

We also, know, Holy Spirit that throughout the world
you inspire hope, promise new life,
and engage in extravagant acts of generosity and courage.
We thank you and praise you
for creating, every day, infinite new opportunities for us
to love you and love our neighbour, and see your face in everyone we meet.

We ask for your loving guidance here as we seek new paths of engagement at Junction 142.
Help us to find effective ways of working to meet the needs of those who struggle with life.

Be with Myung Hwa as she discerns her gifts and her role in this placement Strengthen her
with your love and peace.

We pray now for all on our prayer list and those known to us who need our prayers.....
Gracious God hear our prayers.

The Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours now and forever. Amen***

TIS 49 Whoever lives beside the Lord(Psalm 91:1-7, 14-16)

1. Who ever lives beside the Lord,
sheltering in the Almighty's shade,
shall say, 'My God, in you I trust,
my safety, my defender."

2. From unseen danger and disease
God will keep you safe and sure;
beneath his wings a place you'll find,
a refuge from all danger.

3. You will not dread what darkness
brings-
hidden danger , deadly plague;
nor will you fear in daylight hours
the evil that surrounds you.

5. God says' I'll save from every harm
those who know and love my name.
In trouble I will honour them
and show them my salvation.'

John L Bell
1949-

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Benediction TIS 779 May the feet of God walk with you

Sing this to the person near you

May the feet of God walk with you,
and his hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you,
and his ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,

and his breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you,
and his love bring you home.

Aubrey Podlich
1946-

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Go in peace now!