

Look to Jesus

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Fourth Lent

3-14-21

Numbers 21: 4-9 Eph 2:1-10 John 3: 14-21

Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22

Summary: Look to whom God has lifted, Jesus Christ, and be not only saved from death but also for heavenly works.

It was vital for the writers of our gospels to establish clear links between God's work in the old covenant and God's new creation established by the gospel of Jesus' life. This is what we celebrated last week in the Holy Communion of Jesus' body and blood. When we look to that covenant, we become new creations.

One of my Junior Sermons speaks of this. I will be reading from "A Feather Blown on the Breath of God," a series of Native American themed stories revolving around the adventures of Chief Pink Feather, a man so ancient that he was on hand for the birth of the Moon! But that is another story. Today, I will speak of Pink Feather and the pit of Donna Wanna.

In the tribal circle of Chief Pink Feather, there was a very unpopular girl named Donna Wanna. She was called this because of what she would say to any plan or project: "I donna wanna do it!"

Her teachers would make up many different activities for young people. "We have materials to practice weaving," they would say. "Also, Beats-the-Wind will train anyone who wants to run fast and long. Or Medicine Fern will teach you how to make a tea to take away fever,"

Others would choose something, but Donna never liked anything. She would suggest a lesson that needed a teacher who was elsewhere that day or demanded materials that were not nearby. Usually, she just said: I donna wanna."

The other children grew tired of her. Leaders would try to get Donna Wanna involved in something, but it took so long that there was less time for others to practice weaving, running, or making medicine. People frowned at her. In time, she noticed what was happening and went to the chief in tears.

"Wise Pink Feather," she sobbed, "People don't like me, Even I'm starting to dislike who I am. I need a new name."

Pink Feather caught her tears in a little bowl. Adding powder, he made a ball of mud. Nodding, he said: "To get a new name you need to become a new person, I will give you a fearsome task and you must never say your old name again after you hear it."

Donna Wanna agreed, Pink Feather hit the mud ball with his war club, revealing a beautiful blue crystal inside. "These are your tears," he said, "Look through them when you fear to fail."

Then, he gave the ordeal. "Go to Deathstalker Swamp, smack a monster on its tail, and run to the center of the swamp when it chases you. You will come to a pit lined with black stones which has no visible bottom. Jump in; then, you will lose your old name and get a new one."

I ... I," began the frightened girl, longing to say, "don't want to."

"Yes," replied the chief.

Glancing quickly at the blue crystal, she said: "I will do it."

Sunning on a rock in the center of the swamp, she found a monster and smacked the Deathstalker on its tail. Right away, he chased her, planning to eat her slowly. Soon, they came to the bottomless pit. A loud, scary voice like twenty thousand terrors came out of the chasm. "Come on; jump in!"

The monster inched closer. Staring through her crystalline tears, the girl jumped in. The Deathstalker crept up to the edge, and the voice spoke again. "Come on; jump in!"

The monster cleared its throat nervously. "I donna wanna," it answered and left, taking the girl's old name.

Looking through her tears, the brave girl saw that she was standing next to Pink Feather in a shallow pit with a lip only four feet above her. "You made that scary voice," she accused.

"Yes. Why did you jump anyway?"

I stopped looking at the pit. I looked through my tears and trusted you,"

"Some people cry at fearful or difficult times," Pink Feather replied, "Others learn to look through their tears and win."

"The monster took my old name. What is my new name?" she asked,

'Sees through her tears," the chief replied. And so, it was.

This child learned to look through her tears, but we have a much better lens. Soon, it will be Palm Sunday when Jesus wept for us before the gates of Jerusalem. Then, He sweated blood for us in the Garden of Gethsemane and both water and blood

poured from His side at the Cross. If we look through Jesus' tears, we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

There was a foreshadowing of Jesus' Cross during the generation spent wandering in the wilderness, looking for the Promised Land. Once again, God's people were complaining and blaming God for their troubles and discomfort. Provided manna from Heaven, they despised eating the same bland food day in and day out. Angered at their attitude, God sent venomous serpents, which poisoned many of these ingrates. Realizing that they deserved what they were getting, they asked Moses to intercede with God in their behalf.

God tells Moses to craft a bronze serpent, attach it to a standard, and lift it up. Anyone who was bitten could come to that standard and, when they looked upon that artifact, they would be healed by their trust in God and saved from death. This parallels Jesus so closely that it is no wonder that every image I have seen of this Mosaic standard features the bronze serpent nailed to a cross.

Looking to Jesus, trusting what God has done, saves us from the venom of sin and the power of death. This is, however, only half the story of salvation. Paul repeats the reality that we, formerly dead because of sin, are alive by the grace of God in the Cross of Christ. Then, he continues and adds, "For we are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we might walk in them."

We are not simply saved from death but for living as citizens of the Promised Land of Heaven. "Blessed are those," Jesus said, "who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled." This filling is like that of the cup in Psalm 23, which overflows as God keeps pouring His blessings into it. Overflowing with righteousness, our lives pour out the good works of Heaven, which, in turn, blesses all around us. These works do not make us saved; they are the visible result of our salvation. So, look to Jesus and be saved. Amen.