

Contexts

John's Gospel

- See notes for last Sunday.
- **Structure of John's Gospel**
  - 1:1-18: Prologue** – An introduction to and summary of the career of the incarnate Word.
  - 1:19-12:50: Part One: The Book of Signs:** the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they do not accept him.
  - 13:1-20:31: Part Two: The Book of Glory:** To those who accept him, the Word shows his glory by returning to the Father in death, resurrection and ascension. Fully glorified, he communicates the Spirit of life.
  - 21:1-25: Epilogue:** Galilean resurrection appearances and second conclusion.
- It is the only Gospel to call Jesus "God".
- Purpose of Gospel is so that those who follow Jesus might have the kind of faith that would give them eternal life, namely, the faith that Jesus was God's only Son, possessing God's own life and had come into the world from above that people might be given that life (and thus be begotten by God) and become God's children. (Raymond Brown SS)

John 3:14-21 – things to notice

- Part of the story of Nicodemus (birth from above, born of the spirit, conversion, rebirth and eternal life).
- Background: "Chapter 3 introduces another Jewish leader called Nicodemus. He accepts Jesus as a teacher but then cannot grasp what Jesus means by being 'born again' (3:3, 5). Jesus then speaks of two types of birth: ordinary human birth through water, and a second birth of the Spirit. This is what Jesus means by being 'born again': a spiritual birth. Nicodemus keeps wondering, 'How is this possible?' (3:4, 9) While he does not totally reject Jesus' words, his lack of understanding means he cannot accept them at this time. Nicodemus' journey of faith will continue in chapter 7, and then he will re-appear to help bury Jesus (19:39)." – Mary Coloe.
- First of 3 "Son of Man" sayings in John's Gospel which refer to Jesus' exaltation' (being lifted up). Note: being 'lifted up' is probably deliberately ambiguous: could mean either or both crucifixion and resurrection.
- Jesus presented as the new Moses ("just as Moses lifted up the serpent ...")
- 'God gave his only Son' - Only place outside the Prologue of John's Gospel where 'only Son' is used.
- So that believers might have eternal life – Jesus the bringer of life in God. Eternal life does not necessarily mean life after death. Eternal life can be another name for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart. Thus, eternal life begins while a person is alive (see below).
- God acts towards human beings 'out of love' so that all who believe may have eternal life.
- God's intention in sending Jesus was not to condemn (judge) the world, but so that it might be saved. Note: 'judge' is a more correct translation than 'condemn' as found in the Lectionary.
- No one who believes in God's only Son is judged, but those who refuse to believe are judged. This does not mean 'judged/condemned by God or Jesus' – it means that shut off from the love of God there cannot be life. Those who withdraw from the light die.

- Human beings are confronted with a choice between light and darkness, and have chosen darkness to hide their evil deeds.
- But the one who 'practices / does' the truth (better than 'lives by') comes to the light - Real belief lies in 'doing the truth' (righteousness).
- '... plainly seen that what he does is done in God' – literal translation: 'the one who practices the truth comes to the light that his works might be seen to have been done in God.' Those who 'do the truth' in 'works which are done in God' are already living the eternal life which belief in Jesus brings.
- Notice, once again, the focus on 'deeds' – those done in darkness (evil) and those done in God (light) - an ethical dualism of 'darkness' and 'light'.

The Lenten Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflect on for the Fourth Sunday of Lent?

- There is a link between the Gospels of Sunday 3, 4 & 5.
- Last Sunday Jesus is the new temple – the living presence of God.
- God is not found in stones but in Jesus, the living Temple.
- This Sunday Jesus comes as the expression of God's love to bring life to those who believe.
- Jesus comes, not to judge but to heal and to save.
- No one who believes is subject to judgement (or condemnation)
- Whoever 'does the truth' comes out into the light and becomes a witness to God.
- Jesus is the Light.
- The Lenten journey is a journey into the Light. Surrounded by God's love we are able to allow that love to transform us, to give us light, to do the truth in the light.
- The Gospel reassures us of God's love and our salvation in Christ, and calls us to be witnesses to the Light, to show forth the light of love and truth by acting according to God's heart.
- Our call (the church's call) is to be light in the darkness by doing the truth about God/Jesus in deeds of loving kindness.

### Reflection

This Sunday marks a change in the Lenten focus. We are no longer so absorbed by our own limitations and weaknesses in faith. We are more confident of God's kindness, forgiveness and healing without which we would never dare embark on this journey. We look forward to the Easter celebrations with joy and hope.

On our journey from temptation to transfiguration we are becoming, through faith in Christ, the living presence of God in the world, the light in the darkness.

The first reading speaks about the re-building of the temple in Jerusalem – a reference back to last Sunday's Gospel. For the ancient Jews the re-building of their temple was a moment filled with hope and expectation.

Last Sunday Jesus promised the building of a new temple to house the living presence of God and to be the meeting place between God and us. Our Lenten journey is rebuilding us into the living Body of Christ, into dwelling places for God and meeting places between human beings and God. This is clearly seen when human needs meet God's compassion through us. That's when God's love and light shine in the darkness of human lives.

Today's Gospel contains a number of important statements of our faith: God loved the world so much that he sent his Son, not to condemn, but to save; the Son must be lifted up (crucified and resurrected) so that all who believe might have eternal life; those who do

the truth come out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that their good deeds are done in God.

The Gospel reassures us of God's love and our salvation in Christ, and calls us to be the Light, to do the truth of God's love by 'doing' God's heart in our lives.