

## **John 3:14-21<sup>v vi</sup>**

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

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### **<sup>v</sup> About the Gospel: John 3:14-21**

Today’s reading is taken from the first of John’s lengthy expositions of Jesus’ teachings. This discourse as a whole (3:1-21) moves from the work of the Spirit (3:3-8) to that of the Son (3:11-15) to that of the Father (3:16-21). Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night because of his interest in the signs Jesus has performed. Jesus seeks to draw him past these outward manifestations to a recognition of their inward significance.

The lifting up of the Son of Man points to his exaltation on the cross and in the resurrection and ascension; for John, these are one single act of glorification, offering believers eternal life by participation in God’s life.

Verse 16, one of the most familiar verses of scripture, succinctly describes God’s goal—to offer eternal life, God’s motivation—love for the world, and God’s strategy—giving the Son. Jesus has become the watershed for life, both now and in the future. Those who reject Jesus face condemnation in the day of judgment, and they live now in darkness and fear. Those who believe “in the name of the only Son of God” (v. 18) have escaped future condemnation, enjoy the promise and reality of eternal life, and live in light and truth.

### **<sup>vi</sup> Reflection and Response**

Anyone who pursues a craft will appreciate the analogy in today’s reading from Ephesians. The words “For we are what [God] has made us” (v. 10) speak profoundly to people who quilt, sculpt, paint, do carpentry or create any of a wide variety of art forms.

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These artists know how painstaking the process of creation can be. The initial conception may be gift or inspiration, but it is only the first step. There follows a long period of planning, transferring the vision to paper or canvas and laboring to bring it to birth. When we create artworks ourselves, we may have some inkling of what it means for God to create us collectively as a people and individually as works of art.

To define ourselves too narrowly would do an injustice to God's ongoing work of creation. After all, God isn't finished with us yet. Knowing that we are engaged in the co-creation of ourselves should boost our confidence, but should not lead to pride. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God..." (Ephesians 2:9).

Today's gospel passage occurs in the context of Jesus' longer conversation with Nicodemus on the importance of being born again. The process of recovering ourselves, or being born again is closely connected with dying. The Jews endured a kind of death for almost 50 years before they were allowed to return to their land. Christ redeemed us when we were dead in sin. Even though he may have had every reason to condemn us, he saved us.

We often think of Lent as a dark and dreary time. In some parts of the world, the climate is still wintry, and spring seems a long way off. But today we read of nurture and surprise, healing and careful handiwork. In the midst of death, we hope for new birth and resurrection. We hear dimly the first notes of the songs we had refused to sing in exile.