



Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March, 2021

What Did Jesus Do?

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Glenda Empsall

[Numbers 21:4-9](#), [Ephesians 2:1-10](#), [John 3:16-21](#), [Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22](#)

Almighty God, whose son Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, grant that your people, illumined by your word and sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's love in all that they say and do, to the benefit of your creation. Amen.

I enjoy doing research for a sermon; defining the context, imagining myself in the scene, delving into the nuances of language and translation. I wondered if there was anything "new" that I could say about the passage from today's Gospel, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:16 is ubiquitous. It's written on cardboard signs held up in the endzones of football stadiums and the peanut galleries at baseball games. Sometimes, the sign doesn't even say "John" – only "3:16" and people are supposed to know what that means. Then several events this month coalesced to make me take a closer look.

One thing is [God willing and the people consenting] Education for Ministry (EfM) will restart at St. Luke's in September. My mentor credentials were due for renewal and the trainer prepared a full schedule for the required 18 contact hours; all on Zoom in six 3-hour segments over 4 days. The final session is this afternoon. Getting to know each other is an important aspect of the training and the instructor asked this question, "What one or two people have shaped your sense of how one has a relationship of "truth and grace?" Many people from church immediately came to mind; folks who, again and again, have overcome impossible situations and yet maintained their sense of humor and positive outlook, and continued selflessly doing the hard work of caring for others, even as they were seriously stressed. I confess that I used the characteristics that I admire to make a composite of those people. No names, but you know who you are! [And are you ready for EfM?]

Another ah-ha was a reflection question at a clergy Zoom with the Bishop, "Why Jesus?" It's a deeper question than I first thought it was. If I am honest, I initially followed Jesus because of the place and circumstance of my birth. My parents and grandparents were Christians. We went to Sunday School and church almost every Sunday. The signature of my 8 year-old self is on the Charter of Saguaro Christian Church in Tucson, AZ.

I drifted away from "church" for some time in college and, for many related reasons, it was the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helen's that called me back. This is not to over-dramatize the "mountain top" experience! Some people have them and many do not, including some of the most spiritual people I know, and that's OK. The church is a symbiotic system. We are each part of the structure; critical cogs in the mechanism of a Beloved Community. It is the positive influences of significant people in my life and the relationships within communities of faith that have helped me stay connected, even in "troubling times."

Finally, I am involved with the diocesan Woven as One capital campaign for Camp Cross. Each of us has different gifts and it is in joining together, Woven as One, with our focus on loving God and loving our neighbors, as Jesus did, that we will succeed.

John's Gospel refers to Jesus as "The Light of the World" "...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." What is the cover of darkness hiding – in our world? in our community? in our own hearts? On what structural or systemic darkness do we need to shine a spotlight that is as bright-as-Jesus? How do you let your light shine?

And that is when the lightbulb lit up over my head. Why Jesus? Keep reading beyond John 3:16. "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..." The person of Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, demonstrate for us how we are to live. Jesus was not one to blame or shame. It was not Jesus' job to condemn. By our actions, inactions and how we mistreat other people, we condemn ourselves. I do not believe it is because we lack concern for our neighbors, but because the magnitude of problems in this world is overwhelming for any one person. We are afraid for our own safety and so we do not act on our concerns. Yet act we must! One of my favorite sayings comes from the Daughters of the King, "No one can do everything, but everyone can do something." What gifts do you bring to the table?

Do not ask, "What would Jesus do?" Instead, see what Jesus actually did, and do that. Jesus did not cure everyone on the planet of every ailment. Jesus did not disrupt the natural order to end disease, or poverty, or evil for all eternity. Jesus healed the sick, shared the Good News, comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable. Jesus is our role model to do the same. Are we comforting the comfortable and afflicting the afflicted? What will we risk to change the status quo and make a better world for our grandchildren?

"God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of [your] works... For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works..."

May the power of God surround us, the love of Jesus enfold us; and the fire of the Holy Spirit burn in our hearts and shine forth in our actions. Amen.