

## Fourth Sunday in Lent – Year B

### First Reading – 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23

#### History

- Originally, the two books of Chronicles, formed with Ezra and Nehemiah, a single historical work.
- The Greek title, *paraleipomena*, means “things omitted or passed over (in Samuel and Kings).”
- The author is anonymous, but some authors regard Ezra himself as having been the Chronicler.
- The Chronicler’s Hebrew as well as his religious and political outlook points to about 400 B.C. as the time of composition.
- The book of Chronicles is interesting in that it records much of the same history as the books of Samuel of Kings, but provides a quite different perspective.
  - While the books of Samuel and Kings provide a generally critical perspective on Israel and its rulers, the book of Chronicles provides a makeover, highlighting some of the ideals of Israelite faithfulness.
  - This perspective, though, is not represented in this particular passage.

#### Spiritual/Theological

“early and often” – what kind of God does this describe?

What does the “anger of the Lord” mean to you?

God brings about the restoration of the temple and the return to Israel through a pagan ruler – King Cyrus of Persia. What does this teach us about the activity of God? Can God work through even “less than ideal” instruments?

### Second Reading – Ephesians 2:4-10

#### History

- Disputed letter of Paul
  - If Paul, then during his imprisonment in Rome, c. 61-63 A.D.
  - If a disciple or secretary, then a later 80’s or 90’s date

#### Spiritual/Theological

This passage clearly emphasizes that our life in Christ is all God’s initiative. How does this combat our pride?

The phrase – “By grace you have been saved through faith” – has become a rallying cry for the Protestant position that works play no role in our being made righteous before God.

Two main disputes between Catholics & Protestants over salvation:

- 1) Both agree that good works should be the fruit of saving faith. The debate is whether good works done through faith “merit” salvation.
- 2) Whether one can “lose” saving faith once it has been accepted?

The Catholic position is: “salvation by grace alone, justification by faith and works.”  
How might this perspective be shown in this passage?

## **Gospel – John 3:14-21**

### History

- John’s gospel was the last gospel written, probably in the 90’s, by John or his community
- Very different than the synoptics

### Spiritual/Theological

Read Numbers 21:4-9.

An interesting part of that passage is that God does not tell Moses to remove the snakes, but simply to provide a remedy for snake bites. This leaves then the continued threat of getting bitten.

How does Jesus’ fulfillment of this passage on the Cross carry the same dynamic? In other words, is the reality of sin and death destroyed on the cross, or is it simply their power that is destroyed?

Jesus uses judicial language in this passage, referring to a guilty verdict. What would be God’s verdict of us at this point – are we guilty of preferring darkness to light?