



**A Pastoral Letter from Father Robert Baker
Christ Episcopal Church, Bradenton
Wednesday, 10th March, 2021
Week of the Third Sunday in Lent**

10 March 2021

My dear family in Christ,

This Sunday will be the Fourth Sunday in Lent or Laetare Sunday. This Sunday is referred to as “Laetare Sunday” because the entrance chant or *Introit* begins “Rejoice, O Jerusalem” or “*Laetare Jerusalem*” (Isaiah 66:10). This Sunday is much more celebratory than are other Sundays in Lent and represents a relaxation of Lenten austerity. Why?

When you spend some time with the collect and readings for this Sunday, you can see that we have many reasons to rejoice. When the people of God were in mortal danger from poisonous serpents, God delivered them. Our trust is that God continues to deliver us from mortal danger and from a complaining, ungrateful heart. The psalmist described this deliverance as follows, “He [God] sent forth his word and healed them and saved them from the grave” (Psalm 107: 20). Our response to this deliverance and to every deliverance should be to give thanks to the LORD for his mercy and the wonders he performs for his children; to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving; and to tell of his saving acts with shouts of joy (vv 20-21). Can you imagine how your life could be enriched by this level of gratitude daily?

Paul’s letter continues with the theme of our absolute dependence upon God and God’s absolute love for us and merciful intervention on our behalf. We were once dead, and God intervened to make us alive. We were once abjectly lost, but God lovingly found us in our lowly state, lifting us up and lavishing his love upon us. Do we have any greater reason to rejoice?

Finally, in his midnight conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus compares himself with the bronze serpent. Just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness to rescue the people from poisonous serpents, so also will Jesus be lifted up on the cross, a horrific instrument of execution, in order to save people from judgement, sin, and death. We do nothing to

earn this new life in God. We simply believe that he was lifted up on the cross and we inherit true, divine, and eternal life. We can nothing to make ourselves alive, but God loves us and delights to intervene on our behalf.

Beloved, let us rejoice (and help yourself to a square of chocolate).

Grace and Peace,

Robert +

Useful Links:

ALERT -- everyone over 65 years: Manatee County has moved to a lottery sign-up list for COVID-19 Vaccinations. To sign up, go to this site:

<http://VAX.mymanatee.org>

Lectionary page for 2020

<https://www.lectionarypage.net/CalndrsIndexes/Calendar2020.html>

State of Florida COVID-19 page:

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseasesandconditions/COVID-19/>

Centers for Disease Control COVID-19 page:

<http://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html/>

Diocesan of Southwest Florida Covid-19 Page:

<http://episcopalswfl.org/covid.html/>