

"It's All Your Fault!" – March 26, 2017
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It's All Your Fault! Numbers 21:4-9

I dislike snakes. What snakes need is a sharp shovel to the head. But this morning looking at snakes differently may bring enlightenment. Biblically, we encounter our first snake in the Garden of Eden, and we associate this serpent with Satan and Satan with sin.

Adam and Eve's meeting with Satan happened ages ago, and yet we see evidence of it today. Ever wonder why Emergency Medical Services uses a symbol with a snake in it? A little research will show that the rod of Asclepius symbolizes the healing arts by combining the serpent who sheds his skin as a sign of rebirth and fertility, with a staff, a symbol of authority appropriate for a god of medicine.

In our Lenten journey together we have discovered spiritual dysfunctions that keep our relationship with God and others out of kilter. The first, trust, was followed by honesty. And last week we looked at commitment. In three covenants or agreements with Noah, Moses, and Abraham we saw areas of sin that can be forgiven if we are willing to confess.

When commitments are made in our relationships, accountability, the fourth dysfunction, enters our experiences. It is in our living out our experiences with God and each other that problems occur, as we uncover in our Old Testament text today.

Today's dysfunction might be called 'low standards.' God has consistently shown humanity that there are consequences to our actions. From the Garden of Eden, the passing of the buck, or the blame, has become the norm for humans. "*The woman who you gave me....*" God has since endeavored to assist us to be accountable.

God gave the slaves from Egypt freedom, leadership through first the Red Sea, then the desert; water from a rock, bread and meat from heaven. God even provided essential principles on how to be in a relationship with Him and others.

Yet, these ex-slaves became impatient with God and Moses, as they traveled in the wilderness, crying out "*Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this wilderness?*" They blame God, and Ole Moe, for their problems instead of delivering on their commitments. This shifting of responsibility is often called "The Blame Game."

In Numbers chapter 21 we see God sending vipers into the camp. Anyone who was bitten by a snake died. Nothing like a snake in your tent to get your attention! The people understand that they are responsible for what is happening in their camp. They run to Moses confessing their sin, asking Moses to pray for them.

What is of interest to me is that the people are still not ready for a personal relationship with God; they continue to work through Moses. Moses does take the people's prayer request to God. What strikes me (no pun intended!) is that God does not eliminate the vipers; instead, God gives those bitten a way to be healed. Moses receives statutory instructions on crafting a solid bronze serpent on a stick; and when anyone is bitten, if they look up at this bronze snake, they will be healed and live.

What immense power is found in a word. Years ago the Grand Trunk Railroad held a contest to find a 'safety phrase' to place at a railroad crossing. They offered a large prize for the winning entry. Some entries were long, and some were short. The winning phrase was "STOP, LOOK, LISTEN." Many lives were saved by that simple phrase. In the twentieth chapter of St. John we read the words of Jesus, "*And I, if I be lifted up from earth, will draw all people to myself.*"

God does the healing, but the people must take the responsibility, the faith, to receive the healing. The truth be is, you and I often blame God for a lot of things: marriages falling apart, our aging bodies, dwindling finances, waistlines growing, the weather, etc.

Whatever is happening in our lives now, these are some of the questions that need answering: Do you know, believe, that God is with you? Do you know that God has a way out, a way that will bring healing to everyone involved? Jesus indicates that the serpents in the desert are a picture of His coming death on the cross, and that anyone who looks to Him for healing will be saved and made complete?

If you are a 'Follower of the Way,' and are committed to living out your trust no matter what is happening in your life, are you willing to do what God asks of you? As the poisonous snakes of this life attempt to attack us, we live our lives of love, looking in faith to Jesus to heal and protect us, and to lead us through. What are the poisonous vipers you are facing today? Alleluia Amen.