

WHAT'S BITING AT YOUR HEELS? (JN 3:14-21, Num 21:4-9)

Sermon by the Rev. Corinne Hodges

Sun., March 22, 2009, St. John of the Cross, Bristol, IN

- I. Readings today we hear of the toxins/venom of the serpents, the creatures that are biting at the heels of Israelites—long journey, complain of food & water to God and Moses
 - A. How strange that the cure for their pain involves raising up a serpent, the very thing that is killing them, on a stick—when they look at it they are healed
 - B. Can poison that infiltrates our system ever be good for us?

- II. Treatments involving the use of toxins
 - A. Bladder cancer—Weakened TB bacteria triggers a response in the immune system which attacks not only TB, but also deadly cancer cells=cancer free
 - B. Botox treatment for migraines—toxic chemical causes the muscles to relax=freedom from pain
 - C. Ways in which poison can actually be good for us, offer healing and return to wholeness

- III. Medical proof these days says surprisingly yes, toxins can help heal us of physical illness and disease, but what about other toxins that pollute us spiritually? Can they actually have a positive effect? After all, Israelites needed faith restored.
 - A. Visit with man who suffers from addiction—for him the poison is alcohol
 - B. After years of battling with the disease, going through yrs. of success, he has reached the point where his bad habits have caught up with him
 - C. In poor health, he has to stare the enemy/the poison right in the face
 - D. Poison has brought great darkness to his life—he has suffered. As many with addictions, darkness can cause isolation, loss of physical health, mental stability, joy
“I was most happy when during the time when I was not drinking”
 - E. Finds himself in the darkness, hospitalized and faced with a choice
 1. Return to the darkness, the comforts of the bottle and the poison he knows so well
 2. Step into the light, the brightness which will take courage, self-control, but also offers the hope of new life
 - F. As prayed with him, not surprising that at this juncture, he has turned to his faith—perhaps faith has never been stronger. Next to the dark, the brightness stands out is stark contrast

- IV. We often chose darkness over light in our lives
 - A. This week sitting on porch and friend’s encouragement to get out and take walk
 1. Comfortable where I was, inertia set in
 2. Walk reminded me that friend could not do what I was doing
 3. Sunshine great/light glorious, yet I needed a push
 - B. Friend doing 3-day walk for breast cancer
 1. Tired, impatient, started to complain—feet, hungry, distance
 2. Survivor with hat one whispered “Thank you”
 3. How can I complain? Picked up pace and finished
 - C. It can feel safer and easier to stay in the darkness, but God calls us to step into the light, the light of hope, faith, rebirth and renewal

- V. So what is biting at your heels? What poison is polluting your system physically, mentally, spiritually that you need to get rid of?

- A. It may not be something chemical like TB bacteria, Botox or alcohol, but all of us have toxins we are holding in/venoms claiming our lives: Despair, Obsession, Greed, Bitterness, Unforgiveness, Self-loathing
- B. Keeping these in the darkness is not going to help us or liberate us from them
- C. Need to raise them up, stare them in the face and make a choice
- D. But even higher than the poison, we need to raise up Christ. For Jesus exalted at his cross and Resurrection...that means healing for all.
- E. Christ saves us and the new life he promises does not start after we die, it begins now in the present age.
- F. It's a quality of life where we choose the good over the bad; health over illness, depression or obsession; and gather the strength to take those crucial first steps to walk from the darkness into God's great light