



## Lent 4 March 11, 2018 St. Mary Magdalene

### John 3:14-21

Jesus said, “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, 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; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For 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.”

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From a video entitled “Look up”

*I have four-hundred-and-twenty-two friends, yet I am lonely.  
I speak to all of them every day, yet none of them really know me.  
The problem I have sits in the spaces between  
Looking into their eyes or at a name on a screen.  
I took a step back and opened my eyes,  
I looked around to realize  
The media we call social is anything but.  
When we open our computers, and it's our doors (that) we shut.*

*So look up from your phone, shut down display.  
Take in your surroundings, make the most of today.  
Just one real connection is all it can take,  
To show you the difference that being there can make.*

Gary Turk is a filmmaker and spoken word artist who created the video entitled “Look up” a few years ago. The video, which has attracted over 500 million views worldwide, is a five-minute spoken word performance mixed with a filmed narrative that looks at how using smartphones and social media too much can disengage us from real human interaction and from living in the real world.

The refrain “Look up” echoes throughout the video. Look up from isolation and be open to encounter and conversation. Look up from a kind of faux world and take in the real world of challenge confusion, and joy. Look up and, I would say, look around, and in being in the moment, in being available to the moment, meet the people and get involved in the situations that will transform your life. Stop looking down so much and look up!

There are, of course, lots of reasons we might be looking down right now. Sure, some of us are addicted to looking down at our phones or our tablets. But others of us are looking down or looking away out of a sense of the discouragement we feel about the world and where things are going environmentally, politically or economically. It’s all a bit much as we continue to hear especially about the violence that the vulnerable and the innocent continue to suffer in our world while those who could or should do something about it, do little if nothing. And so we look down or look away to protect ourselves from disappointment and further discouragement.

And so all this was really intriguing to me as I came to our readings for today, twin readings really, from the Book of Numbers and from the Gospel of John. Both of these readings are about something or someone lifted up, put in a position that we or others are to look up at and to look up to in order to be healed.

In our story from the Book of Numbers, we hear about the hard time the children of Israel are having in the wilderness. They don’t like it at all, and so they complain, saying that Moses has led them out into a place that has no water and has detestable food! God is not amused by this complaining and sends serpents to bite them. The people ask Moses to pray to God to take the serpents away, and in response to his prayers, God tells Moses to put a serpent on a pole and to tell the people that those who look up at it will be healed from their snakebites.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus references this very story from the Book of Numbers when he speaks of *himself* as the one who will be lifted up. But the Gospel of John adds something new to this idea of being lifted up. While in the other Gospels, the word “to be lifted up” is used only to mean being taken to a higher place of exaltation and honour, in John, it also means to be lifted up upon a cross. And so in John, what and who we are to look up to is not some higher up, some affluent and powerful ruler; we are to look up at and to look up to Jesus on the cross. Jesus on the cross—an innocent man executed by the state who, in John’s Gospel, retains every ounce of his human dignity while at the same time experiencing extreme and unjust suffering meant to humiliate and intimidate. We, you and I, are to look at and to look up to these two things together, as a path to healing and wholeness, not just for ourselves alone, but for the whole world.

For as John goes on to say: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

And so what does all of this mean for us?

I think it suggests that where we direct our gaze is important. What we look at and who we look up to is important. I think it suggests that checking out, looking down or looking away is no response to make, or to make for long, in a world where innocents are lifted up on the cross every day and where human dignity is easily shredded right before our eyes. I think it also suggests that looking at Jesus on the cross, powerful and willing to suffer, exalted and risking humiliation is something that we are to take into ourselves and enact in our own lives.

And so what might it mean to believe that our greatest human dignity is accessed when we act in solidarity with those who have been given no dignity? What might it mean that we are most beautiful when we roll up our sleeves and get our hands into the issues that we regard as the ugliest? What might it mean for us to believe that when we dare to dwell in the lowest moments of our lives that we are walking around in the heights of our humanity? What might it mean for us to believe that when we embrace our own wounds and vulnerabilities, we are on the cusp of discovering our most powerful strengths?

Almost a month ago now a young man with an automatic rifle entered a high school in Florida and began shooting. 10 minutes later 17 people—teenagers and teachers were dead. Though stories like this have occurred over and over again in the US, something new began happening in the days and weeks *after* the shooting had never happened before. A group of the surviving teenagers, with the pain and suffering of their experience still written large on their faces, were lifted up by their classmates, their parents, by their supporters and by the situation itself, for us all to look up at and to look up to. And what we saw was this—we saw simultaneously the suffering and wounds of their experience and the dignity and power of their humanity. We saw both of these things, and in our seeing them, healing, however small, however incremental, was set loose.

And so today, look up, look up from whatever distracts you, be it your smart phone, your tablet, your downheartedness or your feeling of powerlessness in the face of all that is coming your way. Look up and see the people and the problems and the situations around you. Look up and see the holy and human one on the cross, the one whose power is in his woundedness, whose dignity is in his identification with those without dignity and whose beauty is in his community with the unlovely. Look up and see who you are supposed to be, who you can be if you look up and look around, if you live in and respond to the real world. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son and God so loved that world that he gives you and me, *gives you and me* that the world may not perish but have healing, have wholeness, have eternal life here and now.