

## Lent 4

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God....”*

We heard these words of St. Paul from his Epistle to the Ephesians. They are awesome words. It is interesting that in other sections of this week’s lectionary readings we heard a diverse understanding of God and God’s Will for us. In the Old Testament reading, we hear that many of the Jews were upset with Moses and God’s reply is to send poisonous serpents that bit the people; many Israelites died. Then in this week’s Gospel reading from St. John the writer says, “God sent Jesus into the world.....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.”

Which of these three passages represents the God whom we are called to worship? I choose St. Paul’s interpretation. Not because it feels best, but because in my mind St. Paul’s representation expresses more fully the God I have come to believe in and accept. Many people accept the notion that God can get angry and go after God’s folks. Others are convinced that some of us will be saved and others of us will not. I believe all of us will be saved, not because God does not call forth responsible behavior and thoughts from us and not because we are always these nice, decent people, but because God through God’s Son has said, “I will have you in the end.” God’s love will exceed our thoughts and our behavior. St. Paul’s words are there for us to hear and accept; we have been saved through faith and it is not our doing but it is God’s gift to us.

The reality is that we all at various times and various circumstances live below the people we are called to be and want to be. That which brings us back is not some extraordinary spiritual experience on my part or yours, but the gift of grace from God. It is that graced-filled moment from God, that gift from God that challenges our consciousness, enlightens our minds and places the balm of healing upon our souls. It is God’s doing and God’s alone, and God will continue that process for every single human being, enfolding us in God’s loving and caring embrace both now and forever.

Amen