

Title: For God so loved the world

Sermon scripture: John 3:14-18

Last Wednesday was Ash Wednesday according to the church calendar. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. Lent in Korean is Sa-Soon-Jeol. "Soon" means ten days. Sa (which means four)- Soon means 40 days. Lent is the time to wait for Jesus' resurrection for 40 days. Since Easter is different every year, the Lent period based on Easter also fluctuates. So how is Easter decided? The criteria set by the Eastern Church (Orthodox) and the Western Church (Roman Catholic) are different. We follow the traditions of the Western Church. Easter is celebrated on the Sunday after the full moon after the spring equinox on March 21 every year. If the full moon rises on Sunday, Easter falls on the following Sunday. So Easter is different every year because we consider both the solar and the lunar calendar. If you are one of those people who celebrate your birthday by the lunar calendar, you'll know how it feels. Anyway, this year, April 9th is Easter because the full moon rises on April 4th after the spring equinox.

Easter is the most meaningful and important Christian holiday. Because the resurrection of Jesus overcame the power of death that most strongly influenced those who were under the power of sin. Adam's disobedience puts humans in a fate that is bound to die. What was given to humans as a result of sin was death. The fact that Jesus solved the problem of sin that humans cannot solve on their own is like saying that he solved the problem of death, the result of sin. Jesus had to overcome death in order to redeem his people who had been put under the power of death. The resurrection of Jesus means that he overcame death. When we have the faith of resurrection, it means that we are free from the power of death and come under God's rule. Resurrection is a significant event in which people who suffered from the power of Satan are reborn as the people of God's kingdom. That's why Easter is considered the most important Christian holiday.

People at the time of Jesus honestly didn't need Easter because they were able to actually see Jesus who was risen and remembered touching him. However, as those who experienced resurrection gradually passed away, Easter was needed to keep the meaning of resurrection alive. According to the church tradition, Easter was regarded as the same meaning as the Jewish Passover. It is said that Jews fasted and prepared for the Passover to sustain its true meaning. Lent shares the similar meaning and sentiment. The practice of moderation and piety was carried out more strongly to welcome resurrection, the core of the Christian faith, with deeper emotion. This holy proposition, "There is no resurrection without the cross," is an important motivation for Lent. Lent can be said to be a season when we crucify ourselves, deny ourselves, and experience the cross. Lent is the period when we walk together on the path where Jesus Christ bore the cross and die completely on the cross with Jesus. This is because only those who die completely with Jesus on the cross can deeply experience the excitement of living with Jesus.

It would not be an overstatement to say the quality of a year's spiritual life depends on how you spend Lent. When I was a child, I saw huge rice bags stored up in the warehouse during the fall harvest. Lent can be considered as the autumn harvest of our souls. This is when we're paying close attention to the year-long farming of our souls. The power of Lent pilgrimage gives us the strength to survive the year, so you can imagine how important this season is. The Lent pilgrimage that we will walk together until Easter is so precious. The word pilgrimage is used because the essence of life lies in pilgrimage. We are the ones who go on the road to match the heart of Christ. I believe that if we can connect with Jesus' heart and emulate Jesus' love through this pilgrimage, our souls will be richer.

2.

I mentioned that the Lent Pilgrimage journey connects with the heart of Christ. We cannot simply pass through the words of the text if we really want to understand the reason and the heart of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. John 3:16 is a verse that we recited from childhood. In order to understand this simple and gracious word, you have to understand very complex structure. The word "so" in Greek is "hutos (οὕτως)", meaning "in this manner, like". God loved the world like this, and in order to understand the meaning of it, you must first understand the words of John 3:1-15. At the end of John 2, there is an incident in which Jesus cleansed the temple. And following that incident, Jesus carried out miracles to many people and showed signs. I have already spoken to you about the background of the cleansing of the temple while preaching about John the Baptist. The temple system was a religious business centered around the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. They were bent on making up for the bribes they had given to Herod's family. One of the central forces was the Sanhedrin Assembly, a religious and political organization composed of 71 representatives. The council of Sanhedrin consisted of priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, and elders, and Sadducees were said to have the greatest power. The reason is that the Sadducees were priests who held the real power of the temple system.

A man named Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin community, visits Jesus in the middle of the night. He was a Pharisee who was one of Jesus' oppositions. You can understand that the Pharisees are lay teachers of law. They are considered the intellectuals. He is introduced as 'archo'n', which means *head, beginning, or leader*. Jesus calls him 'Didakalos', which means someone who teaches him. Nicodemus is a Greek name. It's a combination of Nike (victories) and Demos (people). Choosing a Greek name 'victories people' suggests that he was a teacher of Hellenistic ideas. Just before he came, Jesus turned the temple upside down, and his oppositions must have been furious. However, after the cleansing of the temple, Nicodemus saw that Jesus performed miracles while healing the sick. He became curious about who Jesus was. That's why he decided to visit Jesus himself. The fact that he came to see Jesus at night means that he wanted to see him secretly. It's because it gets complicated if you visit during the day and it becomes known. There would be a front-page article in the Jerusalem newspaper right away. "Nicodemus joins hands with Jesus," "The leftist Nicodemus meets the insurgent Jesus who turned the temple upside down" I'm sure there would have been articles like these. Nicodemus secretly wanted to know where the power of Jesus came from. "Rabbi, we know that you are from God. If God is not with us, no one can do the signs you do (V 2)." This means, "Why do you treat the law and the temple carelessly when you are certain to come from God?"

In response to his words, Jesus says that Nicodemus will understand this only when he is reborn from above. Nevertheless, Nicodemus doesn't understand the meaning of "born from above." Nicodemus couldn't understand the saying that God's kingdom could only be seen by being born again by the Holy Spirit. Jesus also said, "You are a teacher of Israel and you don't know this?" It requires the experience of being shaken by the power of the Holy Spirit but because Nicodemus was trapped in the religion of the law it was impossible for him. Jesus says he is the wind of the Holy Spirit from the throne of heaven. The Holy Spirit is God's wind from God's throne. We do not know from where or to whom the wind blows. This means that encounter with the Holy Spirit is not achievable by human effort. It means that the Holy Spirit cannot be invited by our hard work or effort. Holy Spirit is the wind that God gives freely.

3.

In the meantime, Jesus brings up the story of the bronze snake of Moses to make it easier to understand. He wanted to tell this story through the history of Israel in what direction the Holy Spirit's wind came in.

We need to understand all this structure in order to comprehend the meaning of "so" due to its complex concept. The phrase directly connected to God's love of the world is "Like Moses holding a snake in the wilderness." This is an important passage to understand the direction of the Holy Spirit and an important clue to understanding "so." And it takes us to the Old Testament, Numbers 21:4-9.

The passage of John 3:14-15, "Just as Moses holds a snake in the desert, so must the Son of Man. It is to give eternal life to anyone who believes in him" depicts the judgment that the people of Israel suffered from resentment against God. Earlier, the people of Israel went around the desert to enter Canaan because 10 of the 12 spies to Canaan gave negative reports. Thus the 39-year journey in desert begun. As the road was winding and rough, people's resentment erupted. The people resented God and even Moses, the leader. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us in this desert? There's nothing to eat. There's nothing to drink. I'm fed up with this humble food (Verse 5)." This resentment was a verbal provocation that nullified the salvation of Exodus. God couldn't bear it because people denied God's salvation, and He decided to place judgement upon them.

God sends a "venomous snake" (written as "fire snake" in Korean Bible) among the people to bite them. It's not a snake that spits fire out of its mouth. It's a snake with a deadly poison. People who were bitten by fire snakes were dying after their hearts burst. The people ran to Moses and shouted for help. Then Moses, the leader, came forward and prayed earnestly to God. Then God offered one solution to save them. The shape of the fire snake that bit them was to be made of bronze and suspended from a pole. People who were bitten by snakes would live just by looking at a bronze snake. In order to save those who are dying from the bite from a fire snake, they had to kill the fire snake, that is, kill death, and hang "bronze snake" that looks just like the fire snake. People who were bitten by the fire snake came to life the moment they looked up at the bronze snake.

When bitten by a reptile snake, a biochemical reaction occurs in our bodies. The poison will rush into the heart in the blood. But the moment people who were dying looked at the bronze snake, they came to life as if there were biochemical changes in the body. To quell biochemical reactions, it's common sense to solve them with the same biochemical therapy. It would make more sense to consume some form of natural herb. But God is not giving a surgical diagnosis, but a belief therapy that he's using to heal people. God is asking for this amazing imagination of healing with faith.

What are the implications of this event? Isn't it to kill the fire snake itself to make a bronze snake in order to stop the power of death in people who are dying by being bitten by the venomous snakes? To make a bronze snake by killing a fire snake which is the power of death, is to kill death one more time. Anyone who believes that this power of death comes from God's judgment can live only by trusting God's unconditional will to forgive, by looking at the bronze snake as an expression of faith. It proclaims the principle that salvation is not obtained through biochemical reaction, but by faith.

4.

That God so loved the world like this means that he wanted to save those who were caught in the curse of death in this way. He loved the world by killing fire snakes and making the bronze snake to save people who were being bitten by fire snakes. Here's the hidden meaning. Jesus came to this land to save those who were falling while doubting God's love amid the curse of death. In order to break the curse of death, it must be killed. Sin is energy

and mass, so it's gone only when it is transferred away in a different form. Jesus had to break the curse of death to save humans. To do so, Jesus himself chose to bear the death and die. The innocent son of God decided to save mankind by tying the bronze snake on a pole. He became a battered fire snake to prevent the poisonous energy of the fire snake. Jesus willingly took upon himself the sin that drove humans to death, and took the curse to save mankind.

God's love is revealed in the way that the son of God, who perfectly enjoyed God's love, voluntarily became a bronze snake on this earth to complete God's love. People begin to understand God's love when they see this preposterous voluntary suffering and obedience, being beaten like a bronze snake and killed on a shameful cross. After looking at the beautiful obedience and sacrifice of God's son who became a bronze snake and hung on the cross, those who were under God's curse, come to believe in God's love. This is the direction of the Holy Spirit's wind blowing from the heaven's throne. It also means that the world still sees God's salvation in this way. God's love is evidenced in this world in the way of a bronze snake hanging from a pole.

This magnificent salvation that we marvel was the result of the constant obedience of God's only son. The obedience was a radical obedience that resulted in death on the cross. God's love is proved and witnessed because someone who is pure and without sin like Jesus, was obedient until he suffered and died. That's what it means when we say, God so loved the world.

Even today, God's love is evidenced by people who obey to the level of His begotten son.. God's love is delivered through Jesus' followers who closely follow Jesus and strive to live his life.

Why do we experience healing while watching Father Lee Tae-seok's life? Because of the hardships added to his holy and sacrificial life. He is called the saint of South Sudan. He gave up his comfortable life as a doctor and went to a place called Tonj in South Sudan. He was a missionary in South Sudan, a member of the Salesio Monastery. His ministry became known to the world when the movie called "Don't Cry Tonj" was aired. If there's hell in this world, it's probably South Sudan. There was no hope for the people of South Sudan, a Christian country devastated by the civil war with Islamist North Sudan. Father Lee Tae-seok delivered God's love to Hansen's disease patients in South Sudan. The priest passed away early, but those who knew him have no doubt that God loves the world. This is because they experienced God's love of the world through him.

Christ's love can still be conveyed through the obedience of those who bear the burden of others and endure the hardships of being beaten for them. The scent of Christ can be spread through the lives of those who fully obey the Holy Spirit, the wind from heaven. Only those who are convinced that God loves this world can give their life like a bronze snake. Just looking at the lives of such people gives us healing. Because they're people who give their lives like bronze snakes and bear the burden of others. The world can be healed by people living like bronze snakes.

Even now, the world is full of people who doubt God's love. There are many people who's lives are full of unfairness. Children who grew up being abused by their parents cannot believe that God so loves the world. Unless someone becomes a bronze snake and heals their lives, they will not be able to accept God's love. We don't need a missionary to prove that 1 plus 1 equals 2 because everyone in the world just believes it. But to show that God is love, we need someone to prove it. Unless people in the world see those living it, they will never believe it. Holy Spirit is still blowing arbitrarily to create copies of Jesus. The wind of

the Holy Spirit blows randomly and accidentally, so we cannot know who it will blow to. Only those exposed to the wind of the Holy Spirit gain the power to live as bronze snakes by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It's because we don't have the power to live as a bronze snake in us. May the wind of the Holy Spirit strike your life during this Lent. I bless you to live a life of obedience to the will of God our Father, not your will. Don't be a fire snake that bites and kills your neighbor. Rather, be a bronze snake and hope for a life that heals many people. I would like those who are dying in doubt of God's love will look at your life and feel God's love. Lent is a period during which we train and devote ourselves to follow Jesus and become a life of a bronze snake. It's a period of killing our lust and desire, and being crucified completely with Christ. It's a season when we hope to be a little Jesus. I bless all of you that during this season, your life will be filled with wonders when more people who do not believe in God's son and headed for judgment (Verse 19) are finally brought to Christ by your life of love and truth (verse 21)