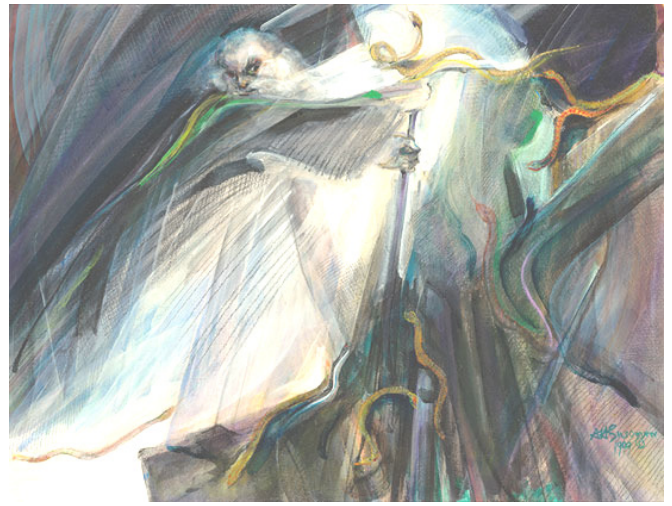


**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz**  
**March 18, 2012 Lent 4. Numbers 21:4-9**



**The Bronze Snake**

<sup>4</sup> They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; <sup>5</sup> they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup> The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in Hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

*Complain! Complain! Complain!* It's easy to complain! There's a radio commercial that asks the question – "Do you hate your job?" Do you wish when you punched your time clock on Monday morning that it would punch you back so hard that you would be unconscious until Friday afternoon-quitting time?" Do you know jobs like that? The glass is always half-empty. They have doughnuts at Kwik Trip – 4 for \$1. Nice frosting on a cake doughnut – but look at that hole! Bacon – don't you love bacon? But sometimes it's undercooked and it's all greasy! Sometimes it's overcooked – and it's just burnt splintered slivers! I remember back in the day – when we had milk at school – white milk in little glass bottles – sometimes separated – so that it was kind of watery on the top – with little white and yellow curdles of cream – almost butter. And if it was really cold outside there would be little slivers of ice! Pears – I don't like pears – they kind of look like an apple and kind of taste like an apple – except there is this mealy little gritty stuff – unless you get one of those brown little watery bruises? You get the point. It's easy to complain – to find fault – to criticize and complain. There was a bottle of wine the other day \$20,000 for a bottle of Chateau something. People swirled it and smelled it and did that indescribable breathing thing. And when asked, "How was it?" They said, "Not bad!?" Not bad?! That's all you got? Not bad?! Sometimes, I'm afraid – we think it's pretty funny – pretty clever to say something sarcastic – to complain. Very amusing – we think. Our Heavenly Father is not amused: Today God's Word reminds us:

**The LORD's Love Never Changes!**

- 1. People often complain bitterly**
- 2. The LORD keeps His Gospel promises!**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on this morning – is from the book of Numbers. What do we know about Numbers? What's with the name Numbers? Numbers begins with counting the Children of Israel. They numbered the men 20 years old and up – listed for service in the army of the Great I AM. There were 603,550 men to fight for the glory of the LORD. This numbering took place after the LORD came near His people at Mt. Sinai – the giving of the Law – the Promise that the LORD would make the children of Israel His people – and would bring them into the Promised Land! This numbering took place after they made the Tabernacle – the tent where the people would bring sin offerings and guilt offerings – whole burnt offerings – and fellowship offerings. Where they had the most holy place and the ark of the covenant – where the glory of the LORD would come near God's people! The second numbering is at the end – 38 years later – at the end of the Land of Moab. This time – men who were 20 and up totaled 601,730. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb – this second numbering was the new generation which would inherit the Promised Land. This second census took place in order to divide the land of Canaan – an inheritance according to tribes and families. There were perhaps 2 million plus people in this army of the LORD. The book of Numbers – records the march through the wilderness. Chapters 1-10 the organization of this army in preparation for the journey. The next 11 chapters records the journey of this army from Sinai to Moab – that took 38 years. The final 15 chapters are teachable moments on the plains of Moab – including Balaam and Balak. Remember the curses that only came out as blessings – the talking donkey – and the plan – destroy their marriages and families – by having people marrying people who pulled them into gross and obscene fertility cult worship? Remember? Destroy the family and you will destroy the nation. Have we not learned that lesson thousands of years later?

As we catch up with the Children of Israel today – they have finished 40 years of wilderness wandering. The past generation was gone. The new generation was here. The LORD delivered the Canaanite King Arad into their hands. Here we go! And then the King of Edom – the King of the Edomites – the descendants of “cousin” Esau said you can't walk through our land – you will not – you must not! You have to go around. That did it! This latest delay and frustration was the straw that broke the proverbial camel's back. <sup>4</sup> **They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way;** The Hebrew literally says the *soul of the people grew short*.

Short souls – do you know how that feels? Sometimes – when there is stress – when there is pressure – when there is frustration – we get upset. Dumb little things that normally wouldn't bother us at all – suddenly are a big deal! Suddenly nothing is good enough. Suddenly everything makes us bitter and angry! People are good at complaining. Wednesday afternoon it was beautiful out. I put the top down on the Mustang as I drove up to the Hospital. I told the volunteer there-, “What a beautiful afternoon!” She said, “Oh, yeah, it's just about perfect. But that wind – I don't like that wind. It's kind of damp – isn't it? We always have to complain, don't we?” And I thought – “No! We don't have to complain. We could just say – by the grace of God it is a beautiful day!” And then stop. Don't say it's too windy – too bright – too anything! <sup>5</sup> **they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of**

**Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"** At least they got this part right. They were complaining first of all against God – against the Great I AM – the LORD who changes not – the same yesterday and today and forever! Out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? Really? It had been 40 years of God’s protection and providence. People were wearing the same sandals – they hadn’t worn out. They wore the same clothes – they didn’t wear out! There was manna 6 days a week. All you had to do is pick it up! Did they need a great variety of food? I don’t think so!

**<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.** The LORD disciplined his children. He didn’t just pound them because they complained – he disciplined them – because he loved them! The discipline was painful. Suddenly there were venomous – poisonous snakes everywhere. They bit with such a fiery nasty bite – that many Israelites died! The bite was fatal! **<sup>7</sup> The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.”** The people understood. We have sinned against the LORD – first of all. They had sinned against their Heavenly Father and they had sinned against Moses – the leader their Heavenly Father had given them. The first breach was between people and their Heavenly Father. The second breach was between people and their leaders. That wasn’t right either – and the people repented!

**“Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. <sup>8</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” <sup>9</sup> So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole.** Moses prayed and very quickly the LORD answered. God had mercy on his people. He told Moses – make a snake and put it up on a pole. Look at that bronze snake – trusting the Gospel promise of God – and you would be spared! Think about over a million people! Think of one bronze serpent! Moses must have made that snake and pole as fast as he could. What a sense of urgency must have seized Moses as he snake and put it on the pole – then rushed out among the people – to call out to them – “Look at the snake! Look at the snake! Anyone who has been bitten – look at the snake and live!” How the word must have spread through the camp – bring anyone who is bitten. Bring them before it’s too late!”

**Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.** Did everyone who was bitten look at the snake? I doubt it! Why? Because – still today – you can invite people to come to church – come to Bible Class – come to Lord’s Supper – bring your children to our Lutheran Grade School – send them to Luther Prep and Lakeside Lutheran High School – and they don’t – they won’t. I have bumped into people at the grocery store and ACE and at Wal Mart and Walgreens – getting in and out of their cars on Main Street – pulled up to the pump by them at Kwik Trip and said, “Come to Church and hear God’s Word! Jesus loves you very much! God bless you!” And they don’t – they won’t come to Church! We need to pray for the people we love – that can’t remember the last time they came to Lord’s Supper! We need to pray for people to realize how much Jesus loves them – before some terrible accident – some poisonous snake bites them, too! Pray without ceasing for them. Remember God’s Word –

God's encouragement – to encourage fellow believers with gentleness and great patience. Invite them to hear the Gospel!

The bronze serpent was very very special! So special that they save it – kept it safe as a reminder of the grace and mercy of God. But then – as often happens – something that started out innocent enough went to extremes and got out of hand! Literally hundreds of years later – good King Hezekiah – tried to keep safe the faith and the souls of his people. God's Word says: **<sup>4</sup>He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).** The high places were places of fertility cult worship – the pillars and Asherah were perversions that were violent and gross. And somehow in the middle of all this – was the bronze serpent that Moses had made. Enough was enough – Hezekiah smashed the serpent into pieces – literally. Truth be told – there are all sorts of high places in our lives – people, pleasures, things and stuff that we have given first place in our hearts. We have broken the first commandment again and again. We fear, love and trust in all kinds of things more than God. For that we are ashamed. This new week – the LORD will make us strong – to quit complaining about all the frustrations we are sure to bump into. Instead we will thank and praise, serve and obey him – until he gives us perfect rest in Heaven for Jesus' sake. Lift high the Cross! Amen!