

# Gospel Lesson for the Week

**February 17, 2008**

## **Second Sunday in Lent**

*For your convenience, you can also copy (highlight the passage then press Control-C) & paste (Control-V) the passage names into the [BibleGateway Search Engine](#) located on this site and read the passages online.*

**Please Read**

[John 3:1-17](#)

Read also

[Genesis 12:1-4a](#)

[Psalm 121](#)

[Romans 4:1-5](#)

[Romans 4:13-17](#)

*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."*

*Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"*

*Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.*

*What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'*

*"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

*Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"*

*Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"*

*"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.*

*If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"*

*No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.*

*“ And 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.*

--- John 3:1-17

**John 3:16 is the ultimate scriptural cliché. But don't knock clichés, and don't let a smug, sarcastic, wearily tolerant, smile form on your lips over this one. Like most clichés this one points to an important truth. Jesus, in dialogue with Nicodemus, imparting to him the necessity of new birth, draws an analogy between the saving serpent staff that Moses lifted in the wilderness and the cross on which one day he will be impaled. God loved, God gave, Jesus died, the world is saved, and every believer inherits eternal life. Good News! Nothing to snicker about.**

### "How can these things be?"

Into a BudLite world  
came a man with a placard.  
What does this mean,  
this name and two numbers  
spliced together:  
*John 3:16?*  
More than a pious slogan  
or a mere sign  
lifted along an NFL sideline,  
it is the charter of humanity,  
positing a God who loves and gives,  
a Son who died,  
a world saved from condemnation.  
*Eternal life.*

And there are corollaries  
to this good Good News:  
If God so loves and gives  
and we are created in God's image  
then are we not similarly bound  
to love and give?  
So I will give first to God,  
holding nothing back.  
No tithe is really good enough  
for such a lover.  
All that I am and have

come by God's grace.  
The claim is total and absolute;  
I will hold nothing back.

And I will love the world  
and give my share  
toward its renewal and preservation.  
If God valued the creation  
enough to invest the greatest treasure,  
God's Son,  
the least that I can do  
is the least that I can do:  
buy low-energy light bulbs  
recycle everything I can,  
conserving all my resources  
and taking whatever steps seem prudent  
to preserve this fragile planet.

And I will love humankind,  
whether it be the person near at hand  
or in some distant place,  
sharing with him the good Good News,  
offering to her a life-giving hand,  
a morsel of food,  
a vial of serum,  
knowledge to be imparted,  
a skill to use and pass on.

So next time I see  
a man with a placard  
with no message other than  
a name and two numbers:

*John 3:16*

I'll bow for a moment  
in reverent grateful silence,  
but only for a moment,  
for I must get busy,  
helping to bring to life  
the reality of that slogan.

*I know what it means.*