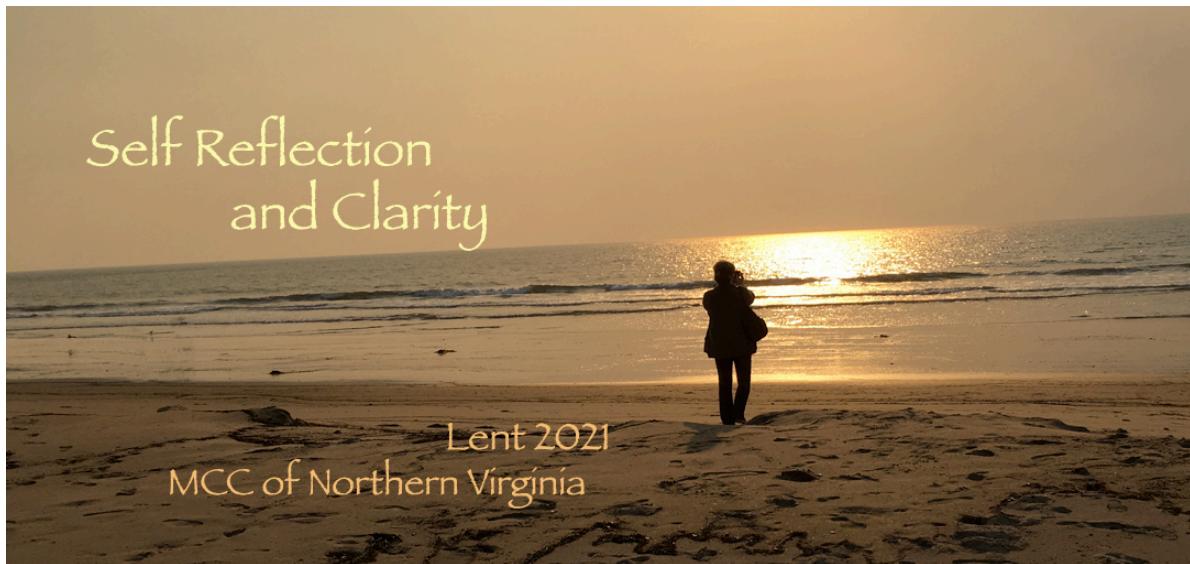


March 14, 2021

Fourth Sunday in Lent



Pitfalls

**Rev. Lori McPherson
Preaching**

First Reading ~ *Numbers 21:4-9*

The Israelites traveled from Mount Hor along the road to the Sea of Reeds in order to avoid Edom. But the people grew impatient along the way, and they addressed their concerns to God and Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? We have no bread! We have no water! And we are disgusted with this terrible food!" Then YHWH sent venomous snakes among the people. They fatally bit many of the people. So the people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against YHWH and against you. Intercede for us, and ask that God remove the snakes from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And YHWH said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it on the end of a pole. Anyone who is bitten and looks at it will live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then whenever the people were bitten by a snake, they looked at the bronze snake and lived.

Second Reading ~ *John 3:14-15*

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so the Chosen One must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in the Chosen One might have eternal life.

Third Reading ~ *from Michael Casey in The Road to Eternal Life*

If I were the devil, the way I would choose to tempt good people would be to lead them up the garden path of self-approval. I would suspend serious temptation for a while and make it easy for them to perform all sorts of visible good deeds so that they felt secure in their virtue

and in the approbation of others. Perhaps I would encourage them to push themselves into even greater exertion than prudence would allow. Then, when they were tired or burned out I would strike a single deft blow and fell them in an instant. I would follow up with whispers that would cause shame and self-disgust and thus try to lead them into the abyss of despair from which it is very difficult to escape. This is where my strategy of temptation would finally lead, but it would begin with delusional self-approval, with their being elated by their good observance so that they lose all sense of dependence on God.