***Introduction To Be Read During the Announcements At The Start of Service:*** The reading of Holy Scripture together as a community has been a central part of Christian worship throughout the Church’s long history. It has deep roots within the practices of Israel, and sustains God’s people today.

After every Scripture Reading this morning, we’re all invited to take a few moments in silence to reflect upon the passage, and how God’s Spirit might be addressing us through it, as individuals and as a community.

In those moments, pay attention to any words, ideas, or images that stand out to you. In the silence afterwards, ask God to help you hear His heart for you today.

After the Gospel is read, and we’ve taken a moment in silence to reflect upon it, I’ll share a few reflection questions that Pastor Rob has prepared to help us dig in a bit deeper.

*Reflection Questions*

* In our First Reading from the Book of Numbers, the LORD provides a surprising way for His rebellious and unfaithful people to be spared from the punishment they had brought on themselves: They are to look at a bronze image of a serpent… a symbol of death, and the enemy of humanity that goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden story, and which was the source of their current pain. And yet, the LORD promised “*everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.*” (Numbers 21:8). A symbol of death and punishment became the source of God’s salvation.
* In our Second Reading from Ephesians, St. Paul draws the contrast between the *old* lives of Christians, driven as we all were by selfish desires and sins that we could not escape, and the *new* and everlasting life God has freely given to us in Jesus Christ… a way of life set apart for the good work of His Kingdom. This new life in Christ, St. Paul insists, *cannot* be earned or deserved, but is a *gracious gift,* given to us through faith in Jesus, because of the great mercy and love of God.
* In our Gospel Reading, Jesus refers to our First Reading from Numbers to point us to how the Living God is at work in His life, and *especially* in His death. Just as the LORD turned the serpent, a symbol of death and evil, into a source of his saving mercy and grace for His rebellious children, so Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, would be lifted up on the cross, a symbol of the world’s violence, cruelty, and complete rejection of the claim that all people are made in God’s image. And yet, this symbol of sin and *death* would become the way that God would graciously *rescue* His children from the power of sin and death, as *anyone* who looks to Jesus, the crucified and Risen One, and *believes* in Him will be saved.
* **These readings all invite us to reflect on the mercy and grace of the Living God, coming to our rescue in Jesus when we were at our very *worst*, and motivated by a love that we can *hardly begin* to imagine. Consider how Jesus turns something as *evil* as the cross into God’s gift of new life for *anyone* who will receive it. How is God asking us to trust in His saving love *today*?**
* **The cross shows us that God longs to rescue us *all*, and to set us free to share His new life. What is God calling us to leave behind as we place our trust in Jesus, not just to give us eternal life, but to reshape our choices and actions right now?**
* **What else is God’s Spirit saying to you today?**