

Holy Trinity 5/26/2024
John 3:1-17 B

“TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS ONE IS BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT, HE CANNOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.”

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. You know that that means, right? Mr. Big Shot. When Mr. Big Shot walked into a room, people noticed. When he opened his mouth to speak, people listened. When he walked down the street, people got out of the way. Nicodemus, this Pharisee, this ruler of the Jews, could go wherever he wanted, do whatever he wanted to do, and say whatever was on his mind and no one dared question his motive.

Except us. We're going to question his motives. What we want to know is this: There's Mr. Big Shot, dancing in the moonlight, like an old racoon digging through a garbage can. What's up with this guy? Why is he being so sneaky?

Why is anyone sneaky? **Fear.** Nicodemus has heard all about Jesus. He knows all about the signs Jesus can do. He's heard about Jesus' teaching. Nicodemus is convinced Jesus as come from God. So, he has to check this out. He has to find Jesus, have a conversation with Him, and so he goes. At night. In the shadows. When its dark. The reason he does this is because he's **afraid**. He's at that fine line between curiosity on the one hand and fear on the other. To make this clear: he's not afraid of Jesus, he's afraid of his fellow pharisees. You know how they feel about Jesus. In their minds, Jesus is not from God, he is all wrong. The way the pharisees see it, Jesus is the offspring of Satan, the enemy, someone who has to go away.

In the back of Nicodemus' mind, you just know he has to be thinking: If that's what they think of Jesus, if that's what they want to do to Jesus, what will they think of me, what will they want to do to me, if they see me with Jesus, asking Him all these questions? That's why Nicodemus is out there, dancing in the moonlight.

But, you know what? He's a really good dancer. He makes his way to Jesus and says to Him, "*Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God. We know no one could do these signs unless God is with Him.*" In other words, I don't care what they may say, I don't care what they may do, I want to find out about this Jesus. And Jesus turns to him and teaches him, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"

Truly, truly, I say to you, I don't get it. I don't get what Nicodemus' statement and Jesus' statement have to do with one another. Here's Nicodemus going to Jesus and saying, "*Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God,*" and Jesus looks at him and says, "*you must be born again.*" How do these statements mesh; what do they have to do with one another? Know what? I'm not the only one who doesn't get it. Nicodemus doesn't get it, either. That's why he turns to Jesus and says, "*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*" At least now, Jesus and Nicodemus are talking about the same thing. They are both talking about being born again. And you don't have to be a medical doctor to understand why Nicodemus is confused.

How can you be born again? How does that work, Jesus? Jesus answers him that one must be born again "of water and the Spirit." Jesus

is talking about spiritual rebirth. He's talking about being born again unto God. And He says to Nicodemus that must happen.

Do you see the problem? Nicodemus' mind is set on earthly things and Jesus is talking about heavenly things, about being born again to God. Jesus want Nicodemus to get this and Jesus wants you to get it, as well. We must get it because Jesus said that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. And there lies the problem for Nicodemus, for you, for me. We are born of the flesh.

Being born of the flesh, hearing Jesus teaching about being born again of water and the Spirit, we say, "Hu? What? I don't get it." Because that which is born of the flesh is flesh, we engage in the works of the flesh, *sexual immortality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, and things like these (Ga 5:19-21)*. The works of the flesh can make life miserable and creates a huge problem for us – that which is born of the flesh and do such things cannot enter the kingdom of God.

That's a problem. God wants us to inherit heaven. Jesus ascended to prepare a place of us there, but being born of the flesh stands in the way. That's why Jesus said that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. That's when you find yourself with Nicodemus wondering, how can these things be?

That's when Jesus needs to talk to you of heavenly things. These heavenly things: *"God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."* Out of purest love, the Father looked at all of us born of the flesh and saw out sad state of affairs. He

saw that because we are born of the flesh, we cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

He said simply, “No. My love will not permit it.” So out of His great love, He sent His Son, Jesus, to descend from heaven not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Jesus came into this world, born of Mary, and took on flesh, becoming a human being like you and me, but did not engage in the works of the flesh. Out of His great love, God takes all the works of the flesh – all the sexual immortality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, all of it – and lays it upon Jesus. And Jesus goes to Calvary’s cross, because the Father condemned His Son for all the works of our flesh. Jesus has nails driven through His skin, His tissue, His muscle, into the wood and then is lifted up, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so that all who look to Jesus will have eternal life. Upon that cross, Jesus shed His blood, endured the punishment for all your works of the flesh, and died your death, for you.

And so that you can be born again, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and forty days after that, He who had descended to earth, ascended back into heaven. Ten days after that, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit, who blows like the wind where He wishes, but who always blows through the water, so that in your own holy Baptism, the water and the Word and the Spirit is applied to you. You were joined to Jesus so that you died with Him and rose with Him so that all the works of your flesh were washed away in that water. And you were born again, born again into the kingdom of God.

And what a kingdom it is! It is a kingdom of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. It is a kingdom of

the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. All that is yours because you were born again of water and the Spirit.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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