

SUSTAINED BY SCRIPTURE'S SONG - GOD SO LOVED
A SERMON BASED ON JOHN 3:1-21
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2019
10:00 a.m.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee.

This means he was educated.

This means he had status in the community.

Just by his role he carried authority and influence in the community.

It was similar to what it would have been like

to be clergy a hundred years ago.

Nicodemus was also part of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council.

Think federal government minister.

Nicodemus had power.

He had knowledge.

He had influence.

He had power.

He more than likely had means as well.

Nicodemus seems to have had it all.

But somehow, in the quiet of the night,

He sought out Jesus.

He was looking for more.

He had the humility, the hunger and an openness of spirit to know

there might be more,

more to life than all that he had learned,

more to life than all the influence and power he wielded,

more to life than all he had acquired.

Jesus seemed to know more and have more.

So Nicodemus sought him out.

But he did it in the night so as not to draw attention to himself.

He spoke to Jesus with respect.

'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God.

No one could perform the miracles, the signs, you are doing,

if God were not with him.'

Jesus showed him more.

In a short sentence,

gave him truth, wisdom and a path.

Jesus gave him more.

“I tell you the truth,

unless a person is born again,

he or she cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Born again.

Now over the years,

some church people have just brutalized these two words.

Born again.

Chances are if you hear the words ‘born again’ these days,

you will run for cover.

If your gut does a flip when you hear the words ‘born again’

it could mean you’ve run into some pretty insensitive,

pushy Christians,

who are all about giving you a spiritual makeover,

without ever asking your permission.

It is so unfortunate these words have been ruined,

because they are a great combination of words.

There is nothing that sounds quite as appealing,

as a 'do-over' or 'fresh start' or 'reboot'.

Start over.

Fresh beginning.

Reset the odometer back to zero.

Resuscitate. Renew. Redo.

Born again.

In Koine Greek, ancient common Greek,

which is the original language of the New Testament,

the word 'again' is a word that can have two meanings.

As well as 'again', it can also mean, 'from above'.

Born again can just as legitimately be translated, 'Born from above.'

Born from above.

born again from above.

Jesus is clever with his words.

This is the lesson for Nicodemus.

For a man who had extensive knowledge.

For a man who had extensive power.

For a man who had it all,

and had it all figured out,

three was this lesson from Jesus.

There is more.

You must be born again.

You must be born from above.

It's tempting to think that Nicodemus is a little obtuse.

Nicodemus asks a question that seems like it might be a stupid question.

Nicodemus asks,

'How can someone be born again when they are old?'

Even we know Jesus isn't talking about going back to the womb,

and we aren't theology professors.

So how can Nicodemus be so slow?

My gut check says, that actually Nicodemus totally gets it.

Gets it and is terrified by it.

I think Nicodemus has that feeling you get in the pit of your stomach

when having been on your computer for hours

working on you that essay or spreadsheet

and then the power blips off

and you realize you didn't save it, and it's all gone.

I think Nicodemus has that feeling you got,

when the dog's collar got tangled in your knitting yarn

so that when the doorbell rang

and the dog went running for to the door

it took more of the sweater with him,

undoing all you work.

You must start again.

Be born again.

Born from above.

Because there's more.

Nicodemus' question, his words suddenly makes perfect sense.

You can feel the lump in the pit of your stomach.

How can someone start over when they are old?

How can someone be born again when they are old?

They are the words of the person who has already built their life.

and declares, 'How can I go back? It is too late for me.'

They are the words of the person who believes they can't shake their past

and declares, 'How can I start over after what I've done?'

They are the words of the person who already has their theology,

their philosophy of life and isn't willing to reconsider it.

'How can I undo all I have knit together?'

Nicodemus isn't liking what he is being told.

He doesn't have room in his life to consider it.

He's got the education, the power and the money.

Why be born again?

It is a very difficult thing,

a particularly difficult thing

for the self-informed, self-reliant, self-made, and self-sufficient

to hear.

Those with their own truth, their own wisdom and their own path.

People like Nicodemus.

People like us,

may not want what more requires.

Nicodemus at least had the wisdom and the courage to seek out Jesus.

To hear Jesus' thoughts.

Jesus taught him truth.

Gave him wisdom.

Presented a path.

Jesus said, 'You must be born again, born from above.'

The old ways aren't going to cut it.

Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

Because Nicodemus was willing to learn,

willing to ask questions,

willing to humble himself enough to entertain the possibility

that maybe Jesus was on to something,

that Jesus could offer more,

because of Nicodemus' open spirit

we have all been given the privilege

of learning the heart of God.

God's is not a heart not that wants more from you.

God's heart wants to give you more.

Jesus told Nicodemus,

'For God so loved the world that he gave

gave his one and only son

that whoever trusts in him shall not perish

but have eternal life.

God did not send his Son to condemn the world,

but to save the world through him.'

It is A.W. Tozer who says it is a law of the soul,

that your life will move toward whatever it is you think about God,

whatever that one line is that is your mantra,

whatever the belief is that you hear running in your head

it will guide your steps.

Nicodemus was told.

You must be born again, born from above.

Whatever else you think about God,

if you think he is harsh, or judgemental, or aloof, or distant,

if you think God is ignoring you, or doesn't care, or is only interested

in you meeting all his expectations and getting it right,

if you think the only reason God wants anything to do with you
is because of what he wants from you,
well, that's not correct.
That's not it.

Whatever it is you have been thinking about God,
put it aside.

Whatever you think you know, empty it out, reboot.

There is more.

God loves the world.

God gives.

God sacrifices what is most precious to him to save.

God so loved the world he gave his son.

To those who will trust him,

he gives eternal life. He saves.

God didn't send Jesus to condemn the world,

but to save the world.

If you think about the times you have been at your best,
when your heart was it its best

You were loving.

You were giving.

You were sacrificing for another.

You weren't condemning.

You were redeeming, helping, rescuing, caring.

You knew there was more.

That you could be more.

You were moving towards God's heart.

That is life in the kingdom of God.

That is the truth, wisdom and the path that leads to life.

Because he was willing to let Jesus show him more,

Because Nicodemus was born again, born from above.

his life changed direction.

Nicodemus became more.

We learn later in John that Nicodemus became one of Jesus' defenders.

And that it was Nicodemus who provided all the burial spices for Jesus

after his crucifixion.

Nicodemus became a follower of Jesus, a disciple,

he was born again and born from above.

There is more.

You can be born again, born from above.

Let God's heart, in his Spirit, with the words of Christ

give you truth,

make you wise,

and lead you on a path to life.

In one conversation,

Nicodemus heard words that changed the world forever.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,

that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world

to condemn the world,

but to save the world through him.

Don't for a moment think that God doesn't have the heart

to save you too.

He does.

God so loved the world,

and you,

that he gave his Son.

You can be born again.

Amen.