

“Born Again”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill
March 8, 2020

John 3:1-21

I am really enjoying our Lenten readings!
And even more than that, I am enjoying sitting
down with a dozen of you, and journeying
together through the scriptures.

This morning we meet Nicodemus.
He is a Jewish religious leader – he is a man of
wisdom, of faith, and insight.
He came to Jesus at night.
He is like a moth drawn to the flame.
He sees Jesus, heard his teaching and his heart
burns within him.
He sees the truth of Jesus’ words, the mighty
signs from God that Jesus performs.
But Jesus threatens the religious establishment.
Jesus threatens how things are, and are done.

Jesus’ teaching is not the same, it upsets
everything, but he cannot be ignored, for he
came with the power and presence of God.

So Nicodemus came to Jesus at night – to discuss
holy things with him, to learn, and have time to
reason it all out.

Nicodemus begins with words that show us that
he knows that Jesus is from God, but it’s clear

also that he does not understand what this means.

Jesus, it seems, sets the conversation off on a completely different footing.

“Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born anew, or born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus saw the signs Jesus did.

And now he wants to build up his understanding step by step, so that he might see the Kingdom of God and experience life in this kingdom; a sort of conversation that will build a stairway to heaven.

He wants a logical, reasonable, safe, discussion.

Newbigin says: “The central question for all sincere seekers is the question about the manner of God’s kingship, of how it is manifested, so that it may be “seen” and “entered into”- that is, experienced as a reality from within.

Jesus immediately, solemnly, and without preamble. affirms that the question will not be answered on the basis of the formulation which Nicodemus has indicated. There is no “building up” of a secure structure of affirmation from this starting point. There is, on the contrary, only the possibility of something coming down from

above, a gift- in fact the gift of a new creation, a new begetting “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:13),” “To experience the kingship of God as a present reality can only be the result of an act of God himself. It is always a miracle, a mystery, an action “from above.”

You must be born again, born anew, given new birth by God.

Nicodemus doesn't understand.

So Jesus restates the same message, only in a strengthened form.

“What I'm about to tell you is true, says Jesus. No one can enter God's kingdom unless they are born with water and the Holy Spirit. People give birth to people. But the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised when I say, 'You must all be born again.' The wind blows where it wants to. You hear the sound it makes. But you can't tell where it comes from or where it is going. It is the same with everyone who is born with the Spirit.”

The wind is invisible.

But it is powerful and when it blows we cannot question its reality even though we cannot locate its source or control its movement.

It is indeed mysterious, yet we cannot doubt its reality.

The wind and breath of God's Spirit blows over people's lives and we are made new.
It is a gift from God.

We are born again.
That language is troubling for some folks, for others it is the definition of faith.

If I asked you when were you born again, some of you would be able to tell me a day or time. God opened your eyes, the Holy Spirit breathed new life, there was a moment, a place, a time. It was a gift from God, and suddenly you knew God face to face.

Others of you would not be able to give a day or time, God has been part of your lives always. You might describe it as the sun coming up. There is a glow before sunrise, light coming, and slowly the light got brighter, but the light was always there.

Or you might describe it as John does, as the wind that blows. Sometimes the breeze is gentle and constant, other times it whips up suddenly and blows everything clean and new.

Either way it is the experience of the breath or wind of God that makes us new.

The air is always around us, sometimes we are more aware of it, but it is always there.

It seems to me that it is like falling in love.

When did you fall in love with God? might be the better question for our day.

For some of you, you have always loved God, and you have always known God's love for you.

For others you set yourselves against God, or you were a stranger from God, but then God's Spirit works and calls us, and woos us, and loves us in all our unloveliness, and one day we respond.

Love comes in many ways, it grows it changes, and when it is God we fall in love with, it brings us life and remakes us.

We love because He first loved us.

Here are our Lord's table as we come to him in faith, we receive his gifts for us and we are made anew.

Thanks be to God.