

“The Wind Blows Where It Chooses”

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John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Prayer.

Our Gospel for this morning is one that drives to the core of John’s evangelical character. The Gospel of John is one that is all about the nature of Christ, the kingdom of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit. It is deeply theological in nature, weaving these common threads (unlike the other three Gospels) throughout the text. It seems that wherever you go in the Gospel of John, we see and experience Jesus, his emerging kingdom, and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus, a leader of organized religion, a Jew, comes to Jesus under darkness of night. Outwardly, Nicodemus is an antagonist of Jesus. Yet our text for this morning reveals that it is a false front, a façade that hides a deeper motive. Does he come to uncover evidence to use against Jesus? Does he come to learn more about him? Or, Perhaps he comes with a longing desire to draw close to Jesus. We can only hope, for we will never know.

From this encounter emerges awkward dialogue on the part of Nicodemus. Jesus, using his best non-anxious presence, allows Nicodemus to stammer and stutter, kick the dirt, and begin to speak: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” (John 3:2)

This isn't a question. This is a statement ... acknowledging the fact that Jesus has been doing signs, signs that are completely impossible without the assistance of God. His observation is followed by a statement of belief. Now there is a new one for you – a holy man who has some sense of belief and faith!

It is an opening. It is all the invitation Jesus needs to begin to speak.

Jesus lays the foundation, the groundwork, upon which he builds his ministry, and I will take the opportunity to seize upon three of his points in verses 3, 5, and 8.

1. "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." (John 3:3) Jesus feels the great desire that Nicodemus has burning in his heart. Nicodemus, like all the rest of us, have a great need to see God's kingdom – not in the hereafter, mind you, rather, in the here and now.

Our motives are good. We seek to work for the betterment of society, and to do it in the name of the Lord, well, that's all the better. The faithful Jew heeds the Law, honors the Covenant, and listens to the prophets. The faithful Christian follows the life and lifestyle of Jesus, reaching out to the poor, the disadvantaged, the outcast, the widow and the orphaned. We would like to think that what we do, in some small way, is making some headway in establishing God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

But, Jesus tells us that the only way to see the kingdom is by being born from above. We can work all day and all night to improve our world, but without being born from above, all our work will be limited, all our efforts will be temporal, with a lifespan, with a natural cycle of birth, life and death.

What makes our efforts a part of God's eternal plan, however, is when we work in the life and Spirit from above. When the Spirit is in us, our eyes are opened, we are given sight unlike we've ever seen before. The Spirit allows us to see God's kingdom as it really is; love and grace cascading from the throne, from the Lamb, flowing through the highways and pathways of life, ebbing into every area of our world. Through the Spirit's insight we become like metal filings oriented by God's magnet, directed towards all good works and ministry that is God's will.

Being born from above allows the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the challenged to stand. Being born from above allows us to take that first step into God's eternal, earthly kingdom.

2. Jesus tells the wondering Nicodemus, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." (John 3:5) Birth is such a wonderful metaphor for entering life in the kingdom. Birth is a water-born transition from the protection of the womb into the big, bold, wonder-filled world. It is an opportunity to step out of our former life, molding our old skin and leaving it behind, turning to the Light, and making the first bold step into the kingdom.

Water marks the transition for Noah from a world of sin to a world wiped cleaned and renewed. Water became the sign and symbol of salvation when the Red Sea parted and allowed Moses and our ancestors to pass. The baptismal waters, of Jesus in the Jordan, and the very same baptismal waters that touched you, welcomes us into the community of God's chosen.

By your baptismal waters, sealed by the same Spirit that descended upon Jesus, you have already been given your entry into God's kingdom. You've already passed the bar, done all that is necessary for living a life in the Spirit, in a kingdom created and ruled by God, a kingdom of grace and love.

Too many Christians spend far too much time worrying over their final disposition. "Are you saved?" "Am I saved?" "Say the name of Jesus and be saved." Salvation has become a tactic of fear, instead of a means of grace - as it was meant to be.

Jesus tells us to stop planning for tomorrow. Tomorrow has been accounted for. We've already been given the keys to the kingdom. The inheritance is already ours to claim. Instead of worrying about tomorrow, I can't help but think that Jesus wants us to be focused on doing his mission and ministry today.

3. "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8) To be honest, this is one of my most favorite passages from the Gospel of John. For me and my experience living a life of faith as a disciple of Jesus Christ, this verse has opened to me great insight and meaning.

"The wind blows where it chooses," I often abbreviate when engaging in conversation with people testing the water of spiritual life. What lies behind this statement are the primary attributes of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is like the wind. You don't see it. Evidence is only by indirect observation. We see the trees wave. We feel our hair being blown astray. We know it is present. It just is.

The Spirit, like the wind, blows where it chooses. It is absolutely impossible to anticipate or predict an awareness of its presence or direction. There are times in my life that the Spirit calls me to reevaluate my direction, my interactions, my spiritual focus. There are times in my experience that the Spirit supports and affirms my spiritual journey. There have been times in my past where I have experienced the perception that the Spirit was absent. Intellectually, theologically, I don't believe the Spirit has been absent; for me, I experienced the perception that I was in a spiritual wilderness.

There are times when our motives are synchronized with the Spirit and there are times when our motives butt heads, and we find ourselves in conflict with the Spirit. The goal, for me and my experience, is to wholly surrender my will to the will of the Spirit, to allow it to be completely led and guided through every thing I think, say, and do.

You hear the sound of it. What kind of noise does the Spirit make? I hear the Spirit in many ways. At annual conference, it may be through a great preacher, lively music, clapping and singing. In a trout stream, it may come when I'm changing flies and discover a previously overlooked fly in one of my cases, and I tie it to my leader, and I hear the sound of the line being cast through the air. When I walk through the church building during the Sunday school hour and hear the giggle of children, running of water washing hands in the bathroom, or the

sound of singing coming from the adult class room – I hear the sound of the Spirit. When someone shares with me a heartfelt concern – either during prayers in worship or in the privacy of a confessional – I hear the sound of the Spirit. When seated at our family’s dinner table, we sing our grace, hear the noise of sparks flying from knife and fork, and talk about the day’s events, that’s when I hear the sound of the Spirit.

“We do not know,” is a powerful statement. Jesus tells us that being alive in the Spirit involves mystery. If you’re not comfortable with living with mystery, with living with the unknown, then, well, until you become acclimated with the mystery of God, you will experience a tension that sometimes can be uncomfortable. Know this, you are not alone in your discomfort. In my life, it is all about process, a continuum that gradually yields to greater ease, greater comfort, greater satisfaction living in harmony with God.

In today’s lesson we find ourselves in conversation with Jesus, our Lord and Savior, as he prepares his disciples for the time that would soon come, when the his Holy Spirit would descend upon them at Pentecost. With God our heavenly Father, we have all the constituent components for the doctrine of the Trinity, one that we celebrate this day, this Trinity Sunday.

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me this day. Thanks be to God! Amen!