

Sermons at Christ Church

Be a Joyful Gift to Others.

Trinity Sunday

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How can anyone be born after having grown old? Asked Nicodemus. He was a teacher of the law who went to Jesus in the middle of the night. His question was in response to what Jesus said-no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. He was obviously impressed with Jesus' ministry and felt that there was something divine about Jesus, but he couldn't tell what it was.

His inquisitive mind wouldn't let him rest. Nicodemus may have thought about Jesus for a very long time. And the impression that Jesus made on him, led him to walk in the middle of the night to seek the light, that light which overcomes all our darkness.

How can anyone be born after having grown old? Jesus didn't make it easy for Nicodemus. Jesus takes him on a different tangent where he ends up being more confused. Obviously, no one can be borne after having grown old, so what did Jesus mean by that?

Truth is, if you want to investigate the mysteries of life with logical determinants, you wouldn't get far. Because there's way more that we know, and there's way more that we know we don't know, there's way more that is beyond human comprehension. Socrates puts it this way "I know that I am intelligent because I know that I know nothing."

I can understand what a mystery is, and the challenges that it poses for us. As humans like Nicodemus, we want to understand why, we want to overcome our complexities, we desire to put life together. We know that like humpty dumpty, we can have great falls but if we cannot put humpty dumpty back together again, we want to know why.

Nicodemus desired to know so he went to Jesus in the night. The point here is not only about his desire to evade the prying eyes of those with whom he shared the authority of the religious establishment, but the darkness in which he was in his own life. Like Nicodemus, we are shrouded in darkness and so it wasn't surprising that he sought the light that would lead him out of his own darkness.

And when he finally met the light of the world, the light opened his eyes to this eternal truth-you must be born again. You don't have to enter a second time into your mother's womb. You must be born again-but you don't have to be a fetus to be born again. You must be born again-but you don't have to be a child to be born again. You must be born again-St. Paul calls this the renewal of the mind.

To be born again is to accept your own darkness-the dark place in which we find ourselves. It could be any place or any situation-it could be about addiction, abusive relationship, loss of faith, indifference to human need and suffering, trauma, depression and other mental health issues. It could be any number of things.

To be born again is to recognize this important gift that you have-that God loved you to the point where God gave His son for your sake. And because of that you can no longer live in darkness-whatever that darkness is.

To be born again is about a paradigm shift in our imagination. It is about re-imagining your life in a different way, where God is the center of that life. A life which overflows with the divine component inherent in every human being. The idea of being born again is but about our ability to understand that the God who came to live among us as the Son, pointed us not to himself, but to God, the Father. He did not only show us what it meant for us to be divine, but that we can all flourish if we tap into the divine qualities in each other.

Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus helps us to understand that God demonstrates His love through the act of giving. Love only comes alive through the act of giving. The ultimate offering of love is realized in the person of Jesus, the Son Jesus, who stood among his disciples, sent them to announce God's salvation and to bear witness to a broken world about the beginning of a new creation.

Since it is the gift of baptism which creates and makes this re-imagined community possible, Jesus invites his disciples to go and baptize, go baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Go Baptize. Go make disciples. Go create a new community.

Being born again is about creating a new community. And if in the past, our task was to subdue the earth, this new community is charged with tending the earth and mending creation. This new community invites us to re-imagine God as one who calls each into a union with Christ. A re-imagined God makes a re-imagined community possible, and each is affirmed by the re-imagined community as an essential part of it. It is into this community that we welcome everyone.

In this re-imagined community, Jesus is our brother, our liberator, our sustaining presence, and redeemer, and we entrust ourselves to him both in life and in death. In this re-imagined community, God is *Abba, Father*. We sense Jesus' closeness to us and his closeness to God. To cry *Abba, Father* is to cease to think of father in a familial context.

To cry *Abba, Father* is to avail ourselves to seek the kind of unity that Paul prays for in a community that identifies itself with Christ "...agree with one another" Paul Says, "live in peace....Greet one another with a holy kiss." In this re-imagined community, the Christian is not merely alone but is one with all people and seeks peace with all.

Here's a story for you. In a Baptist Church in the Deep South, the pastor was late for the Sunday morning service. Suddenly the devil appeared in the pulpit. When the church members saw the devil, they dove out the windows and some hid under the pews. Others run in mass to the front doors and they piled up in the lobby trying to get out.

The place turned into complete chaos. Someone called the police. A man was sitting on the front seat, he didn't move, he didn't flinch, he didn't blink. The devil was surprised and said to him, aren't you afraid of me? Absolutely not. He said. Why not? The devil asked. Well, because for the last 20 years I have been living with your sister.

To be born again is to embrace a re-imagined God who encourages members of a re-imagined community to affirm life in all its fullness, embracing the human desire to live and thrive. This re-imagined community knows of God's healing in times of illness, knows of God's consolation in times of tragedy, senses reconciliation when brokenness occurs and relies on God's abiding presence.

This re-imagined community is a community of Christ that is filled with God's spirit and so it builds people up, lifts people up, and for the sake of the community, everyone brings their vital energies and gifts into the life of the community. Each relies on the relationship that is mainly fueled by the presence of God's spirit.

The overarching drive within this re-imagined community is the awareness that neither you nor I can establish a community with our individual selves. Neither you nor I can have a relationship with our individual selves. You can love yourself, as many people do. You can hate yourself, as many people do. But you cannot establish a community with yourself because you cannot have a relationship with yourself. You need another person to establish a community, that is why we hear Jesus assuring us that where two or three are gathered; where there is a community, I am in the midst of them-for that is the place of relationship, for God thrives only in relationships.

Today is Trinity Sunday, and the idea of the Trinity as fashioned by the church fathers was in part to reconnect them and all who had found in themselves a reflection of the God who created them in His image. It was an attempt to interpret the history of Jesus Christ as the history of God, and to lift up the depth of unity within the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as an example for the new community of believers.

The Trinity is not about numbers, nor is it about a God who is a being among many. It is about a re-imagined God active in a re-imagined community, be it your home, your family, neighborhood or wherever, it is a community which thrives not only because of the grace and love of God, but because of the relationship we build with one another.

A re-imagined God makes a re-imagined humanity possible. For that reason the Trinity cannot be so much of an abstract theory when we know that our reality is nothing but a communion. There is no other form for the Christian life except a common one.

How can anyone be born after having grown old? Asked Nicodemus. To be born again is to be free, free enough to re-imagine a new and different life for yourself and others. Who is it, that isn't in bondage to one thing or the other? You may deny that you are in bondage, but like Nicodemus, you are. And the darkness that surround you is the bondage in which you find yourself.

Do not tarry to seek the one who turns your darkness into light. He will set you free. **Amen.**

