

Pastor Jon's May 30, 2021 Sermon

Text: John 3:1-17

Holy Trinity Sunday

“God isn't finished with you yet”

Did you know that the famous John 3:16-17 passage is a part of a larger conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus? Here, Jesus teaches Nicodemus a new way of believing.

Imagine, if you are Nicodemus, who I fondly like to call Nick at Night, going to school your whole life to learn about God and to figure out what you must “do” to be saved. You are well versed in the laws of God, like a lawyer, and you long to be in right relationship with God through your works of the law.

Then something happens, you meet this person, this teacher, a traveling rabbi who says there is another way. A way that seems too good to be true. It goes against everything you ever know. It goes against your parent's beliefs. Your biases. It goes against your favorite teachers. Your heart wrestles with what is true.

You can't quite wrap your head around it. You want to learn more. What is this new teaching of God?

So you set up a meeting with the rabbi... but you do it at night. Why at night? Perhaps you don't want to be exposed by your colleagues. You don't want to lose your livelihood. But in John's Gospel, night or darkness mean a state of unbelief. In John 1, Jesus is described as the light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

Nicodemus heard about these signs... this man turning water wine at a wedding in Cana, and turning over tables in the temple and talking about rebuilding it in three days.

Then you meet.

In the meeting you completely miss the point of Jesus. The teacher tells you that you must become like a little child in order to enter the Kingdom... to simply be reborn... born this time of water and Spirit. You have worked so hard to get close to God, studying every

law, trying to do everything right... trying to be perfect... and now you must start over and re-enter your mother's womb? Impossible. What kind of new birth is Jesus talking about? Imagine being like a baby, or in our family a new puppy, learning a whole new environment, yard, smells.

His teaching seemed like a foreign language, "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. God didn't send the son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Imagine the mental gymnastics that Nicodemus had to go through to wrap his head around the idea of being saved by grace... God's love for us without our deserving it in any way. When you are trained in the school of law, being saved by grace seems otherworldly. In the Bible, being saved in the original Greek literally means to be rescued or liberated. What do you need to be rescued from? Liberated from?

On this Memorial Weekend, I think of my Grandpa Bert, who always talked about his military work of liberating the Dachau Prison Camp in Germany when he was in WWII. The Jews in the camp were liberated to tell the story of how God rescued them through Allied Soldiers. My Grandpa was liberated from the internal conflict that comes with being in war. He finally saw with his own eyes the truth of why he was there.

Nicodemus was liberated from the idea of striving to earn God's favor through fulfilling the laws of God... from being perfect in order for God to love him.

We are rescued from our bodies of sin, by grace, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. Just like Moses lifted up his staff to save the Israelites who were bitten by deadly snakes, Jesus was lifted up on the cross to save us from the powers of evil, sin, and death in the world.

This is where the whole darkness and light motif in John's Gospel comes into play. It is like the bumper sticker, "Be patient with me,

God isn't finished with me yet." Remember Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. At the end of John's Gospel Nicodemus came into the light with his faith. He joined Joseph of Arimathea to take Jesus' body from the cross and give it a proper burial.

In our baptism we were born again. When we hear the Word of God we are changed by the work of the Holy Spirit days. God fusses with our hearts and changes us... even our most undesirable ways. We know the God loves us just as we are. We don't have to be perfect.

And whenever you are rescued from something, you want to tell the story of how you were rescued. Today in the Word and communion we are reminded that God rescued us, forgave all our sins, and set us free to love the neighbor. We should all walk out of church today feeling lighter and more thankful for what Jesus has done for us.

Amen