

Sunday, May 30th, 2021
First Sunday after Pentecost
Trinity Sunday

BORN AGAIN

As I mentioned last week with Pentecost, we now enter the Pentecost season. Each Sunday is a Sunday after Pentecost, this being the first Sunday after Pentecost, but it is also Trinity Sunday. Now please remember Pentecost has an emphasis on the coming of the Holy Spirit which is a fulfillment of everything that Jesus had said. He told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come, and He would teach them all things, bring to their remembrance what they had been taught, and when necessary, give them the very words to speak.

Last week we saw the Holy Spirit would also convict them concerning sin, that only through Christ can we be forgiven. Convict them of righteousness, that God is righteous, and Christ lived the righteous life on our behalf. And that the Holy Spirit would convict us of judgment, that we truly stand under judgment without Christ because our deeds are worthless.

With Trinity Sunday, we continue to look at the Holy Spirit but now bringing everything together with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we turn to our gospel this morning John chapter three. Yes, where we find the very famous John 3:16 that you can see at almost any professional football game; or something like that, someone is always holding up a card. But understand our readings on John 3:1-17 so it gives us the story behind John 3:16.

It begins with Nicodemus who is identified as a pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. A pharisee, it was a religious political, group that studied the Law and were supposed to be experts in the Law. They put forward a concept of works righteousness, that by following the Law perfectly, we could attain righteousness and go to heaven. As a ruler of the Jews, it further notes or identifies who Nicodemus really was. If he was a ruler of the Jews, it meant he was a member of the Sanhedrin, a group of

seventy who ruled over the over the religious lives, over the temple of the Jews. So, this Nicodemus, he came to Jesus at night. Why at night? Remember they didn't have streetlights and stuff like that. Well, he came at night because he did not want to be seen. But at the same time, he came because he was inquisitive. Why was he inquisitive? What was he wondering about? Well, we see a lot of it, right away in the very first word that he says to Jesus. He approaches Jesus, and he address Jesus as Rabbi. And we heard this week and we also saw in the email I sent, I wear a stole. The history of the stole was that the Jewish Rabbis, the teachers those who have been trained to teach the word, would wear a shawl or a stole. For a Pharisee, someone who was very highly trained, to refer to Jesus, who had gone through no training as a Rabbi, as one worthy, shall we say wearing one of these. That showed a tremendous amount of respect for Jesus. And what he followed it up with, really tells us what was going on. He said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher from God.' So, who is we? The Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. We know that you are a teacher from God. How do they know this? He continues and says, 'no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with them.'

And so, we see here the landscape; there is confusion and conflict within the Sanhedrin. Jesus is doing what only God can do. He is doing miracles, miraculous signs, and wonders. But He is also teaching with a tremendous amount of authority and an adeptness in God's Word that was beyond their comprehension. Remember at 12 years old, they could see how wise He was. And so here is Nicodemus, one of the experts, and here is Jesus, not an expert but teaching in a way that the Sanhedrin were supposed to teach; and doing things that only God can do.

So, who is this Jesus? And are they to respect Him and listen to Him? Yet what He is teaching is contrary to what they believed and taught. So, there were probably some there who were saying 'God is with Him! We have got to listen.' Others were probably saying, 'But we are the experts of the Law, what He is teaching isn't right.' But Jesus comes back with three "truly, truly, I say to you" messages. Now in the Greek it is Amen, Amen, I say to you. Amen means, yes, it is so. It is repeated, and like we have heard before, it is like a giant exclamation point. So, we have, 'yes, it is so, I tell you.' Who is Jesus to tell the experts of the

law anyway? He's God. And therefore, as God's only begotten Son, He can tell those experts of the Law a thing or two.

So, He begins with “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.” With that statement, He is really addressing the issue that is there before the Sanhedrin and He's working with exactly what Nicodemus has said and the obvious conflict and confusion within the Sanhedrin. But notice how Jesus addresses it. Unless one, a person, a Sanhedrin, is born again, he cannot see. See what? The Kingdom of God. Again, remember, those of you in Bible study, in Hebrew the Kingdom of God for the Jews was a phrase that meant God actively at work in our physical world. So, unless a person, a Sanhedrin, much less, is born again, he cannot see God at work in this physical world. He has to be born again! Jesus makes the point, ‘you must be born of flesh and you must be born of the Spirit.’ Nicodemus comes back and this now is a huge debate; how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter again the womb of his mother?

Here comes the second truly, truly. “Truly, truly, I say unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. And very sadly, people stopped there. They basically interrupt Jesus’ words, and they began to argue. They begin to argue and say, ‘when He says you must be born of water, He is referring to the water being broken when a woman gives birth. And when He says born of the Spirit, well that then is when someone decides for Christ, and they are born again. But Jesus did not stop there. He did this so it would be clear us to take His whole statement without breaking it up. “Unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh, is flesh; and that which is born of spirit, is spirit.” So, Jesus is again making the point, you are born of the flesh, and you are born of spirit. And unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot be born again. So, born of flesh is born to a woman. Born of the spirit is born again. And when you are born of the spirit, you get both together. This is a reference to baptism. Baptism is the very first step of becoming born again and notice being born again is an action of the Spirit. It is not our action, it is the Holy Spirit working a miracle of faith in the heart of sinners, faith in the heart of the baby. Only God can do that!

And Nicodemus is hit with what Jesus was saying. He says 'how can this be?' And here comes number three; 'truly, truly, I say to you,' now listen carefully. 'We speak of what we know and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. He comes back to Nicodemus with three "we statements." Three, the number of God and then brings it together with "our." Who is He referring to? The Father, Son, Holy Spirit. This is the Trinity's testimony. God the Father appointed prophets who, as we read, men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. Empowered by Holy Spirit, they prophesied. God, the Son, He spoke, He bore witness to these things as only He could have. He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would work faith and would do everything we have been talking about during this Easter season. Teach them all things, bring to their remembrance, give them the words, convict them of a sin, of righteousness and of judgment. It is the Holy Spirit who comes and works faith. He was there trying to work faith in Nicodemus and in the members of the Sanhedrin. The problem was they, the sinners, the religious leaders, were their own stumbling block. They were the experts, and they could not see God's only begotten Son right in front of them. And Jesus promised He would send the Holy Spirit with power. He did, as we heard last week. And Peter, the disciples, preached in the languages of all men. It certainly had changed them.

So, Jesus continues and says, "I, the Son of God, I have told you earthly things and you do not believe." He told them parables, earthly stories with heavenly meanings. He backed them up with miracles, heavenly changes to the very laws of earth, and they still didn't believe. And so, Jesus says, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? You can't see the obvious things in front of you, how are you going to see the heavenly things? It gets back to, how can you understand heavenly things which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart can comprehend, if you can't even understand that which is right in front of you?

He takes Nicodemus back to his home turf, the old testament, to our Old Testament reading today and says, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up and whoever believes on Him shall not perish." And here is where John 3:16 comes in. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only son, that whoever

believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

And you know that is another verse we probably should not interrupt. We should say that John 3:16 and 17 because God sent His Son to save, He did not send his son to condemn, and we see Jesus doing exactly that as He works with Nicodemus. And God is always worked for the salvation of men as He sent the Spirit to work faith in the prophets, and through the prophets, in the people. And He sends the spirit to us yet again, but now with more with power. Through our baptism we are born again, born of the Spirit. As spiritual people, filled with the spirit, we understand we are sinners, we understand we are born of the flesh, born of woman and on our own we can't understand. But because we are born again, we understand, we believe in His Son Jesus, and we rejoice in our salvation and we act in accordance with the Spirit.

It took a while for Nicodemus, but I think, I can't say this 100% for sure because I am not God. But we see that the rulers of Israel follow Jesus out to Calvary they watched Him nailed to the cross. They watched Him being lifted up and Nicodemus was one of those rulers. And I think, at that time, John chapter three came back to him. Just as Moses lifted up the bronze snake, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, and if we look to Him, we have salvation. And what do we see? That after Jesus was lifted up and He died, it was Nicodemus along with Joseph of Arimathea, another Sanhedrin member that together, boldly went to Pilate, asked for Jesus's body, and gave Him a proper burial with the finest oils, spices, in Joseph's own tomb. I would contend Nicodemus became born again. I bet it was not long after that he came to be baptized.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, there it is, Trinity Sunday. We see Father working, we see Spirit working, we see Son working all for us so that we might be born again. It is something that He does in our life. It's something He does through baptism, the miracle of the water combined with God's Word, the Holy Spirit that He gives that journey of faith of being born again for whoever comes to the baptismal font. It's just like next week, as we celebrate Holy Communion, the Lord's Table. The Lord works a miracle. He comes to us through the bread, through the wine,

bringing forgiveness, bringing the Holy Spirit, bringing us strengthening of faith.

This is what the Pentecost season is about. Seeing the Holy Spirit, God's kingdom, His action here on earth right here, right now. We dare not interrupt and say, 'Oh no that's not correct, the water thing that's actually tied to the birth, to the physical birth with the woman. Why would Jesus repeat himself? Why would He say born of water and then immediately afterwards say born of flesh? Why would He tie the water together with the spirit? If He meant water and the flesh, He would have said those born of water and the flesh are flesh, and those born of the spirit are spirit. But He tied the water to the spirit, and this is why baptism is such a wonderful gift from God. It is God coming and doing the action. May we all believe and be baptized as He said, because God did so love the world, that He gave His only Son Jesus that whoever might believe in Him would be saved.

In Jesus Name, Amen