

2 LENT A

"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."

It is that one simple word, gave, that has made all the difference in my life and yours. It transforms our world from one that only takes to one of self - giving. God saw a deep need in the world for his love so he took the initiative and stepped in and brought us a remedy for that deep ache in our souls.

In the story of Nicodemus we have a man, a great leader of the people, who comes to Jesus by night. Now the fact that Nicodemus comes at night is very significant in the Gospel of John. Darkness carries powerful symbolic weight. Darkness suggests a void and emptiness. Nicodemus comes under cover of darkness perhaps because he fears that others might catch him with Jesus. Jesus loves him despite the fear teaches about the promise of God's gift.

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus is confused by the saying. He takes Jesus literally and asks how it is possible to be born a second time as a baby. Nicodemus is blind to what Jesus wants him to understand. Jesus is telling him there are two births: one in the flesh and the other spiritual. But Nick doesn't have the vision for God's kingdom yet. He sees something in Jesus – hope, promise but entry into God's place is beyond him.

Rebirth is a powerful image in most religions. What human being has not wished on occasion that he might start over, begin anew, with a fresh start?

Abraham, was to receive God's gift of life and His blessing. Yet this gift would require Abraham to leave his country, go to a strange land and start fresh.

You must leave behind the familiar to take on the new.

Jesus challenges Nicodemus to rise above the familiar world he lived in to the realm of the Spirit. Nicodemus needs to be reborn into the realm of the Spirit where God lives. But the darkness that hangs over his way of seeing the world won't let him in.

Jesus agrees with Nicodemus that flesh gives birth to flesh. There is more about this new birth Jesus wants for his friend. And the new birth is this: to be born of water and the Spirit.

Curiously, Jesus points Nicodemus to water, one of those symbols that remind us of both life and death. Give just enough water and it gives life. Too much water and it destroys, as in the story of the Great Flood. Fixed into the ancient mind was the power of water. It makes us feel clean, it quenches thirst and it is the outward sign of a baby being born. Yet again, one must leave one's birthplace and the old life and move on to the new life.

When a person is baptized in water that one enters into a new life – the life of the Spirit. In our baptism we die to self and are raised to new life. Jesus showed Nicodemus, that rather than a self-driven, law-directed life, he could live a “NEW” God-driven, Spirit-directed life!

The Christian faith has always thought about this new birth in terms of baptism by water. The Spirit into which we are baptized is a force that we do not control. If we did control it, we would cease to be Spirit driven and God directed but selfish or self – directed.

I see this new life in the action of a child flying a kite high into the wind. The wind is strong and comes from many directions. It is overpowering. The child can't hold on to the string for long because the kite is wild and out of control. Then the next time the kite is flown, a long tail is tied to it and now it is able to fly straight and higher than ever before.

God who gave the world His Son opens to us the power to become children of God. He invites to live in the realm of the Spirit where He will move us and take us to new places we have never seen. Jesus is the tail that connects us to the world and to the country of strong wind where God lives in Spirit. There he will show us where to fly without fear.

Are we willing to receive the promise of a new country where God dwells? We will have to face trials and loss before we can receive the fullness of that promise of life. As it was for Jesus, so it will be for any human being born in this life: there will be promise, death and resurrection. That is the cycle of life through which we must all go. "A Christian life is nothing else than a daily Baptism, once begun and ever continued." (Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," *Book of Concord*, p. 445.)

In this journey of life may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the Fellowship of His Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.