

The Second Sunday in Lent

Text: John 3:1-17

¹Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, 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 the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And 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[Jesus said:] “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Theme: Everyone Needs a Savior

In the next three weeks we are introduced to three interesting characters in John’s Gospel. Today we have Nicodemus. Next week the Samaritan woman at the well, and in two weeks the blind man who was begging at the side of the road. Each one of these people didn’t know Jesus as their Savior when they met Him, but they eventually came to see Jesus as their Savior. Today, in the story of Nicodemus, we will look at how everyone needs a Savior.

I. When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he probably didn’t even realize that he needed a Savior.

He was a good and upstanding man. The Gospels don’t tell us much about him other than that he was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the ruling Jewish council. The Pharisees were the most outwardly righteous Jews that there were. They tried to follow all the Old Testament Laws and even their own 613 laws perfectly. Nicodemus dressed in the right way. He only ate kosher foods. He gave a tithe of all that he earned. He was so righteous that he was elected to the Sanhedrin. There were only 71 Jews in the whole nation who had this honor. If there would have been someone whom you would think needed no repentance, it would have been this model Jew, Nicodemus.

-He was a pious, upstanding man, and a revered Rabbi.

It is tempting for us to think that we don’t need a Savior. When we look at the 10 Commandments, we might think that we have done a pretty good job. We treat other people pretty

well. Our lives have been pretty moral. We think that we are generous. We even give God His due. When we do transgress the commandments, we always feel that we have a good excuse for doing so. We might not be the upstanding citizens that Nicodemus was, but we are better than a lot of other people. Do we really need repentance?

II. In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus showed that everyone does.

Nicodemus needed repentance. He realized that Jesus came from God because of all the miracles that He did. Jesus response was, *“You must be born again.”* This didn’t make any sense to Nicodemus. He thought that Jesus was talking about a second physical birth. But Jesus was speaking of a spiritual rebirth through the power of the Holy Spirit. This new birth is grounded in the repentance of sins and faith in God’s forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. He told Nicodemus how our deeds are evil, and we hate it when God’s Word exposes them. But God has also given the payment for our sins through the innocent suffering and death of His Son. Jesus told Nicodemus, *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”* Salvation could not be found in Nicodemus’ deeds. Those were tainted with sin. He wasn’t perfect. He needed a Savior.

Each one of us needs that same repentant heart. When we consider God’s Commandments, our first thoughts should not be how well we have kept them. They show us how we have failed to be holy. They reveal our sins and weaknesses to us. They show us clearly that we deserve God’s punishment much more than His love. As Jesus says, we have loved darkness. There are some temptations that we fall into because we enjoy those sins so much. There are no excuses, no if, and’s or but’s.” We stand accused. We need to be born again. But God loved sinners like you and me. He gave His Son for us. Jesus shed His innocent blood on the cross to take away our sins. He wants to give us a rebirth from sinners to become children of God. This happens when we are born of water and the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who through the Gospel and Holy Baptism brings us to repent of our sins and believe that Christ has saved us from our sins. John writes in the first chapter of His Gospel, *“Yet to all who receive Jesus, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent nor of human decision, or of a husband’s will, but born of God.”* (1:12,13) We all need to repent of our sins. Repentance turns us from our sins to God’s grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. We all need a Savior.

III. God blessed Nicodemus with such a repentant heart.

He came to trust that Jesus was his Savior. Surprisingly, even though he was a teacher, it took longer with Nicodemus, than it did with the people that we will look at in the next two weeks. There are two other times when Nicodemus appears in John’s Gospel. In 7:50 he urges the Sanhedrin to listen to Jesus. He said, *“Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what He is doing?”* He was mocked for asking that question. But his greatest act of courage came after the death of our Lord. Jesus’ disciples had all fled. Peter even denied the Lord, and Judas betrayed Him. But it was at this moment, that God filled Nicodemus with faith. He along with Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked for Jesus body. He took about 75 pounds spices to anoint the Lord’s body

and placed it in a new tomb. Nicodemus stayed right until the bitter end. He was not ashamed of his Lord. It reminds me of the 6th verse of “O Sacred Head Now Wounded.”

Here I will stand beside Thee, From Thee I will not part;

As he watched Jesus on the cross, those words came to mind, “*Just as Moses lifted up the snake, so the Son of Man must be lifted up.*” He knew that he needed a Savior, and that His Savior was dying for His sin.. He confessed his sin, and trusted that Jesus gave His life for the forgiveness of his sins. He was born again. Every one of His sins were forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ.

Our lenten journey is to that same cross of Jesus Christ. On Wednesday we had an interesting quote from a church father named Tertullian. He said, “**But we, little fishes, after the example of our IXTUS Jesus Christ, are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water.**” Jesus began His journey to the cross with His baptism, and in our baptism in His name, we were baptized into His death and reborn to a new life in Christ. Through a life of repentance we abide in that baptismal water. As Christians we confess our sins and our unworthiness, but that is a good and cleansing thing because Jesus’ blood washes them away and clothes us with His righteousness. Faith in Him and baptism in His name really do give us new birth. We don’t have to live in fear, guilt and denial. We don’t have to prove our worthiness, because Jesus paid for our sins. We look to Him for forgiveness, and God cleanses us from all of our sins.

We are tempted to think that we don’t need a Savior. When we are honest with ourselves, we realize that we are not perfect. There is a part of each one of us that loves the darkness of sin. That’s why we Christians still need repentant hearts, which confess our sins and trust in the forgiving love of our Savior who gave His life for us. God so loved each one of us that He gave His only Son, so that through faith in Him, we will not perish, but have eternal life. Thanks be to God that He has sent His Son as our Savior.

Amen.

*Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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