

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 "Born Again"

Scripture: John 3:1-21, Psalm 139:13-18

Hymns: At the dawning of salvation 248, Jesus loves me, this I know 373, The church's one foundation 479 (1,2,5),
 Mighty to save, In Christ alone, There is a redeemer, Come thou fount

January 28, 2018

Rev. Steve Filyk

With grandma visiting

Over the Christmas holidays,

Amy and I took the advantage of a free babysitter

And scheduled a little time for ourselves.

After checking in to the Plaza hotel

We marched down an empty, snowy Victoria St.

To our longed-for destination: Pete's Pasta.

There we were greeted by a smiling hostess

And quickly escorted to one of two remaining tables.

Soon we were enjoying some of the best pasta

We've ever tasted!

Talking with friends I discovered

That we were lucky to get a seat at that restaurant.

Lucky that the weather was poor,

That the streets were empty,

And that there was room for us at Pete's.

Often there is a line

that extends outside the restaurant.

Sometimes the restaurant ends up being closed.

And other times there is a sign that declares:

"private party".

Now that I've tasted their wares
I can only imagine the disappointment
Of spending a week looking
forward to dinner at Pete's Pasta,
But arriving to a packed house
Where no tables are available.

In today's Gospel passage a man named Nicodemus
Comes to see Jesus one evening.

Nicodemus was a devout man.
His group, the Pharisees,
Were careful observers of the law.

Nicodemus was also a teacher and leader,
a member of the Sanhedrin,
the council that directed Jewish religious and political life.ⁱ

Nicodemus was a VIP.
In today's passage he comes to see Jesus.
He approaches Jesus respectfully, even deferentially:

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God.
For no one could perform the signs you are doing
if God were not with him."ⁱⁱ

Nicodemus declares that he and his friends
Recognise God's work in Jesus.

But Jesus doesn't congratulate Nicodemus.

Instead he challenges Nicodemus:

“no one can see the kingdom of God
Unless they are born again.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Not it is important to realise

that for the Jews, the 'kingdom of God'

Was the longed-for future event when God
would finally take hold of the reigns of history.

When the kingdom arrived,

the Davidic throne would be restored

And all nations would join Israel in true worship.^{iv}

So when Nicodemus says that he can see signs of the divine in Jesus,

Jesus responds that if he wants to see what everyone is hoping for,

If he wants to see the kingdom,
he must be born again.

But Nicodemus doesn't understand what Jesus is saying.

He is a religious man, yet he knows also knows a little about biology.

And so he asks Jesus just how he's supposed to climb back
Into his mother's womb.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he's not talking about flesh

But he's talking about the spirit.

“no one can enter the kingdom of God
Unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”^v

But this doesn't help Nicodemus much...

For Nicodemus the faith he practised

Had "a good deal to do with being born into the right family.

What mattered was being a child of Abraham.

Of course, other things mattered too, but this was basic.

Now, Jesus is saying,

God is starting a new family

in which this ordinary birth isn't enough.

You need to be born all over again...".^{vi}

And Nicodemus is stunned.

"How can this be?" he asks.

While Jesus started off tersely

His speech become increasingly more abrupt and unsympathetic:

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus,

"and do you not understand these things?"^{vii}

So why is Jesus so frustrated with Nicodemus?

Well as one who no doubt looked forward

To the coming of God's kingdom

Nicodemus should have been aware

Of those promises found in the prophets.

Not just that God would take charge of the nations,

But would change the hearts of God's people.

Consider these words from the prophet Ezekiel:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you,
and you will be clean;
I will cleanse you from all your impurities
and from all your idols.

I will give you a new heart
and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone
and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put my Spirit in you
and move you to follow my decrees
and be careful to keep my laws.”^{viii}

Jesus says to Nicodemus
That he needs to be born ‘another’:
Born again... born from above.

If Nicodemus the Pharisee,
The teacher and leader, wants to see God’s kingdom,
If he wants to see God’s kingdom and enter into it,
He can’t depend on his religious pedigree or obedience.

He needs to be cleansed and transformed by water and spirit:
He must be reborn by God’s power^{ix}

And how’s that to be accomplished?
Jesus says it’s simple.

Jesus says that entering into God's kingdom,
 That entering into this new life,
 And experiencing this transformation
 Comes by putting our faith in him:

"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."^x

Eternal life... kingdom life.

It won't be seen
 just because you were born in to the right family,
 Or because you live as a good person
 (though this is part of a transformed life).

It can't be experienced
 Just because you were baptised as an infant
 Or said a prayer as a young person
 (though water is an opportunity for the Spirit
 As is our contrition).

What matters utterly and finally is the action and power of God
 That we receive as we put our faith in Jesus.
 When God's work in Christ is received by faith
 Something definitive happens.

That kingdom life we were hoping to see or enter in,
 Makes a beachhead in our own hearts.
 We discover new interest and motivations
 All driven, empowered by God's spirit.

Outsiders won't understand.

They won't comprehend what is happening.

But when the Spirit is at work

They will surely notice its effects.

So are you ready to join God on a journey.

Ready to see God's kingdom

And find yourself entering it,

Or maybe it entering you?

Jesus beckons us to trust him.

He's not here to condemn us but to save us.

He is inviting us to share in the fullness

of all that God has for us.

PAUSE

Earlier this week, you decided that Friday nite was date night.

And you've been waiting for the meal all week.

Dinner at Pete's pasta.

Linguini with mushrooms and bacon.

A nice red wine.

Crème brule and coffee to finish off.

When you drive by to park

You see you're in luck,

There's no line-up.

But when you approach the door,
You're dismayed.

While you see other diners enjoying themselves,
a sign has been hung on the door: "Private Event" it reads.

Your heart sinks.

"Private Event".

It doesn't matter how hungry you are,
How much you've been looking forward to this.
It doesn't matter what job you do
Or how much money is in your wallet.

"Private Event" slams the door on your Friday evening plans!

But as you are walking away
You hear a voice shout out to you.
A friend, what's he doing her?
Oh, the host of the party.

He says there's room for you.
Just come with him.

Will we trust that Jesus has something good for us?
Will we accept his invitation to be born again?

May we be willing.
And may we see and experience
All the life God has for us. Amen.

ⁱ See "Sanhedrin" *Wikipedia*

ⁱⁱ John 3:2 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ John 3:3 NIV

^{iv} See “Kingdom of God (Christianity) *Wikipedia*

^v John 3:5 NIV

^{vi} N.T. Wright *John for Everyone: Part 1* 29

^{vii} John 3:10 NIV

^{viii} Ezekiel 36:25-27

^{ix} See D. A. Carson *The Gospel According to John* 195

^x John 3:16 NIV