

### John 3:1-17

When a parent tells his or her child to do something, it sometimes can turn into, more than an interesting conversation, an exasperating one. "Clean your room and make your bed." "But why?" "Because Grandpa and Grandma are coming and I want your room to look nice." "But why?" "Because your room is a mess and they're going to want to see your room." "But why?" "Because I said so, that's why; now go clean your room and make your bed!"

Jesus may have felt like that parent in His conversation with Nicodemus. "Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "But how?" "Unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God." "But how?" Now I'm not sure that Jesus became a little exasperated with Nicodemus at this point, but He then said to him something like this, "You call yourself a teacher, and all you can say is, "But how?"

If there is one day in the Church Year when we may feel like Nicodemus, that day would be today, the Sunday of the Holy Trinity. We sing hymns from the "Trinity" section of our hymnal. We pull out the Athanasian Creed, dust it off, and spend ten minutes confessing it. We then sit back for fifteen minutes and listen to a sermon proclaiming the doctrine of the Trinity; that God is three in one; that God doesn't add up in our minds because one plus one plus one should equal three, but with God it equals one--three Divine Persons and yet only one God. And like Nicodemus we may want to throw up our hands in frustration and say, "But how? How can this be? How is it possible for God to be three in one?"

Our comparison with Nicodemus does not end with the doctrine of the Trinity. When it comes to Holy Baptism, like Nicodemus we may want to say, "But how? How can Jesus be in the water?" When it comes to the Lord's Supper, again we may want to say, "But how? How is it possible for Jesus' body and blood to be truly present in the bread and wine?" And our "But how?" or "But why?" questions do not always stop with the Sacraments. At times we may want to say with Nicodemus, "But why? Why do we as Lutheran Christians not allow our members to join a lodge?" "But why? Why does God forbid women pastors?" "But why? Why do we practice closed communion while other churches do not?" "But how? How can our congregation survive through these difficult financial times?"

After hearing all of Nicodemus' "But how?" questions, Jesus in essence told him, "You're asking the wrong question. It's not 'But how?' but 'Who?'" And the "Who" was the person speaking with him. Like the parent who finally ends the conversation with the words, "Because I said so, that's why!" that also should be good enough for Nicodemus and for us. Faith does not question what God has said; faith believes His Word even though questions may still exist in our minds.

We confessed the words of the Athanasian Creed, but the Creed does not tell us how God is triune; it just tells us that He is. In the catechism, Luther does not answer the question how the water of baptism can do such great things, in a scientific way; he simply says that it's the Word of God that does it. And the Bible does not ever tell us how the bread and wine is Jesus' true flesh and blood; it just tells us that it is.

But like little children we have the desire to question what God has spoken. And it's not because we're curious; it's because we're disobedient. The little child did not keep asking his parent, "But why?" because he was inquisitive; he was downright disobedient. His "But why?" was his way of

saying, "But I don't want to clean my room and make my bed." It should have been enough for the child that his parent was the one who gave him the command; and for us it should be enough that we have God's revealed Word. But we are often reluctant to hear that Word on Sunday. We don't want to spend time studying it, and day after day we put off reading it. Instead of saying, "God has spoken...that settles it," we listen to the opinions of others. Our faith becomes shaped not by what God says to us, but by our own logic and by what is being said on television and in magazines. We base our giving not on the Bible's example of tithing and God's promise to provide, but upon what we think we can afford. We question some of our church's teachings and practices, even though they flow from the Gospel, because other churches question them. So we often ignore the truth of who it is that speaks to us from the Word of God, and we object with our "But why's?" and "But how's?"

But God is patient. The same Nicodemus who kept saying, "But how?" in John 3, bravely asks Pilate for the body of Jesus in John 19. And it's not because he got a good answer for his "But how?" questions. It's because of who he listened to; who he followed; who he watched suffer and die on a cross. Jesus ignored Nicodemus' "But how?" questions, and told him who it is who loved him, and who it is who would save him from his sins. "The Son of Man," He said, "Must be lifted up...for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." It may have been Nicodemus' questions which brought him to Jesus that night, but it was who Jesus was that turned Nicodemus into a faithful Christian.

And so it is with you. Most of you were brought to the waters of baptism as an infant. And you did not question what God was doing. He made you His own child in those sacred waters, forgiving your sins, giving you His Holy Spirit and the gift of faith. And "But how?" never once entered your mind; but Jesus, on that day, entered your heart. As you come up to God's Table this morning, the question of how Jesus gives you His body and blood is not necessary for your salvation. What is necessary is the truth that Jesus is here in bread and wine for you. "But how?" is never going to bring anyone into heaven, but Jesus, who came down from heaven to save you, is He who gives you eternal life.

You and I are going to have questions in our minds till the day we die. Many of them are answered in the Word of God; and there is no excuse for any of us not to be faithfully hearing and studying that Word. For some of our questions there is no answer; but there is Jesus. More important than what you know, is who you know. It's not so much knowing why or how that will give you peace of mind; but Jesus gives peace to your heart. And God sent Him for you--His only Son, to be lifted up on a cross. And now you are forgiven. Now you have a Savior. Now you have the hope of heaven. How? Why? Because of Jesus. He's the answer to all of our questions. Amen.