

John 3:1-17

In 2009 the editors of the Oxford Junior Dictionary decided to remove a few hundred words from the newest edition to make room for new ones. Some of the words they added were: MP3 player, blog, endangered, and tolerant. Some of the words they removed - disciple, (church) pew, and devil. Their explanation was that kid's dictionaries must reflect the changing times, and the simple truth is, they stated, that "people don't go to church as often as before."

We can blame this on poor preaching, busy schedules, a more mobile society, or just plain lack of interest in spiritual things on the part of most people. As a result, many churches have lowered their standards and have resorted to the use of gimmicks to draw people into the pews. "If we give people what they want," is the thinking, "They will come to church."

Jesus used no such gimmick with Nicodemus. He was a definite prospect--a potential new member. Granted, he came to see Jesus at night, so he had to lose a lot of baggage before he would be brought in as a communicant member. But Jesus' attitude toward Nicodemus was a little flippant, perhaps even downright rude. Any Lutheran pastor acting this way today toward prospective members, would find himself in hot water.

Jesus did not spend His time answering the questions Nicodemus put to Him. Rather, when he showed a lack of understanding about the concept of being born again, Jesus rebuked him by saying: And you call yourself a teacher? He certainly did not give Nicodemus what he wanted. The man was probably more confused when he left than when he arrived.

We, too, may share some of Nicodemus' confusion. We just confessed the Athanasian Creed in which the teaching of the Holy Trinity is set forth. But the creed does not explain how God is three, and yet only one, because nowhere in the Bible does God explain it. It simply teaches it. And so as we leave the church building on this Trinity Sunday, we may do so scratching our head even more than when we came in. Like Nicodemus, we may ask, "How can this be?" "How can the Father be God, the Son be God, the Holy Spirit be God, and yet there are not three Gods. but just one?"

God in His wisdom, however, does not explain all the Why's and How's of the Christian Faith before bringing sinners like us into it. Thomas was insistent that he would not believe until he had proof of the resurrection. He had too many questions in his mind; too many doubts. Jesus did not give Thomas a pamphlet explaining how He rose from the dead. He just came to him and told him to stop doubting and start believing. Mary believed that the Christ would be born from her womb not because Gabriel explained how this would happen. He just told her that God would cause it to happen.

For Nicodemus, or Thomas, or any of us to be brought to the Faith, it has to be the way a child is brought into the world. When a child is born, he does not question how he got into the world. He does not insist upon knowing who it is that is spanking his backside, and who that female is lying on the hospital bed, and how it can be possible for her to be able to give nutritious milk to his little body. The baby, without a moment's hesitation, simply starts nursing. He does not question why he is being held and loved. He simply nestles in and loves his mother right back.

And that is how Jesus brought Nicodemus to the Faith. He gave him some pretty hard spanks because at first Nicodemus was not breathing. And Jesus did not attempt to explain the Why's and Wherefore's. He laid him at the breast of his mother, the church. Jesus pointed Nicodemus to Holy Baptism--to the baptism John was doing at the Jordan River. Through baptism Nicodemus would be

born again even without knowing how it could happen. Through baptism Nicodemus would enter the Kingdom of God. Through baptism Nicodemus would be brought to the cross where Jesus' blood would be shed for him. Jesus cut through all the questions that Nicodemus had and gave him what he needed. Through His words of life He brought him close to His own heart and loved him as only God can love.

And that's why Nicodemus loved Jesus in return. After Jesus died on Good Friday, Nicodemus helped take down His body and he buried it in the tomb. And he did this without asking a single question, because now the man who did not know how to be born again, had been born again into the Kingdom of God.

And so my friends, you will leave here today and you will not know how God can be triune. But this Triune God has, in your baptism, brought you close to Himself, given you a place in His family, made you a member of His Kingdom--an heir of eternal life. You will come up to God's altar today and you will not know how it is that Jesus gives you His true flesh and blood with the bread and wine. But He gives Himself to you anyway. And so like a child at his mother's breast, you receive your Savior here in this Sacrament without knowing how it is possible.

We are children...infants who do not have all the answers. And as children, we are disobedient. We are rebellious. When we ask questions, it is not because we really want to know the answers. It is because we are sinful and stubborn. We question how often we have to come to church because there are other things on Sunday mornings we would rather do instead. We question how often we have to have the Lord's Supper because we refuse to see how sinful we really are, so that we do not hunger for Jesus the way we should. We question why sex outside of marriage is wrong because we want to live to please our sinful flesh. We are children. And so, like He did for Nicodemus, God spans us with His Law because we so often stop breathing. We stop breathing in the rich air of His love and mercy. We turn away from His grace. We shut His words of life out of our life.

But your God is full of compassion. He does not turn away from you. He spans you with His Law of rebuke and then pours out on you His blessings in Christ Jesus. He is the answer to all of our questions. Jesus is God's answer to all your doubts and confusion. Jesus was the answer to every question Nicodemus had, and Jesus is your answer today. He became man for your sake. He entered our world to live a holy life for you. He suffered and died, and it was your sin that was laid upon Him. He was punished for your wickedness. He cried, "It is finished!" for you, so that in His life, death, and resurrection you have a perfect Savior. God declares you forgiven--completely forgiven for the sake of Jesus. Everything that needed to be done for you--for eternal life in heaven to be yours--has been done by Jesus. Stop doubting and believe. Whatever questions you have are all answered in Christ. In Him you have been drawn into the love of the Triune God. In Him you have entrance into God's Kingdom. And that's why you, as Nicodemus did, love Jesus so much--because He gave you birth into His family, because He draws you close to Himself in love. In Him, in Jesus, you have, without any question, without any doubt, a place now and forever. Amen.