

John 3:1-17

Even if we were not told that Nicodemus was a man, we could have figured it out on our own. He was okay with coming to church, as long as his friends did not know about it. And he was okay with asking for help, as long as no one saw him doing it. Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night. And although he did not admit it up front, he had a lot of questions and he needed help with the answers.

Jesus was pretty rough with Nicodemus, and I doubt if it's because he woke Him up in the middle of the night. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and he had rejected the baptism of John the Baptist. He was a leader, a spiritual leader of the Jews. He was supposed to be a man who had everything figured out. An "answer man" whom people could come to with their questions about God. But with His very first statement, Jesus points out that Nicodemus did not even know who God was. He was not in God's kingdom. He was on the outside looking in, and the glass was tinted dark.

Now if you are not like Nicodemus; if you really do have everything figured out, then his story may not interest you much at all. But then again, even Martin Luther, the more he learned about sin and grace, man and God, the more he realized how little he knew.

The one thing Nicodemus knew is that Jesus was a teacher come from God. His miracles confirmed this. But he was not convinced, far from it, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus did not want to discuss His miracles with Nicodemus. He spoke of baptism, and the Holy Spirit, and the kingdom of God. "Unless one is born again," He said, "Of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." Now I'm not so sure that Nicodemus did not understand these words as much as he did not want to understand them. Nicodemus wanted to come to God on his own terms, apart from John's baptizing and John's preaching. He skipped over John and went right to Jesus. But that's why he was in the dark. That's why Jesus had no use for him. That's why Nicodemus was on the outside looking in.

What about you...where are you at right now in your life? On the inside? On the outside looking in? Or on the outside not even looking? People in the third category come to church only because someone drags them. People in the second category are, like Nicodemus, full of questions, but cautious and reserved. You are people in the first category. You are inside the kingdom of God. You have been born again of water and the Spirit. You are baptized into Christ Jesus. You did not pull a Nicodemus by attempting to enter God's kingdom apart from His Means of Grace. You were brought into the kingdom of God the only way a sinner can enter it--by being born into it, through Holy Baptism.

We hear about all this, but I'm not so sure we like it all that much. Being born means being passive. You and I did not birth ourselves into this world; our mothers gave birth to us. It wasn't even our decision to be born. Our fathers and mothers made that decision. But once we were born, we wanted to take control of our life. We want our independence. And that's why Nicodemus did not like the thought, and why we cringe too, of this "born again" talk. I don't want to be passive again. I don't want to lose control. I'm a man...or a woman, and it's my life, my decisions, my will.

We felt pretty helpless that night the tornado, or straight-line winds came through. Being blown around by a strong wind does not give us much control. You go wherever the wind blows you. That's how God works. That's how His kingdom works. That's how we are born into His kingdom. "The wind blows where it wishes," says Jesus, "And you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The Spirit blew Abraham all the way from Haran down to Canaan. He was out of control. God's Spirit blew Abraham here and there for the rest of his life. And that's how it is with us. We think that we are in control. We like to be in control of our life. But that's not how it is for people within God's kingdom. God's Spirit blew you into the kingdom of God through Holy Baptism, and God's Spirit blows your life wherever He wishes.

Why does God allow troubles to come? You may as well be asking why the wind blows. Just as a strong wind can damage one roof but leave the next roof alone, so one Christian can develop cancer, another get diabetes, another heart disease, and another have no sickness or disease at all. The wind blows where it wishes. That wind, the Spirit of God, is blowing right now. Why did He blow you here into church this morning, but not others? The Spirit blows where He wishes.

We don't tell God what to do...at least we shouldn't. But very often we resist Him. He blew us into His kingdom, birthing us in by baptism, and now that we are inside, we resist His will for our life and live like those on the outside. We go where we please in life, not where His Spirit is blowing us. We retake control of our life and live how we want, not how He wants us to live. Sometimes we even close our ears to His wind. Like Nicodemus, we reject God's way of dealing with us--His church, His Word and Sacraments, His ministers--we resist His wind, His Spirit. But then we are on the inside looking out. We're in His kingdom, but we'd rather be somewhere else, where we are back in control.

None of this made any sense to Nicodemus until he saw Jesus lose control. He saw the Jews take control of Jesus in Gethsemane, and he saw the Romans control Him with their whips, and rods, and nails, and hammers. Nicodemus saw Jesus out of control of His own life as He hung in agony on the cross, and he saw Him die. And that is when everything made sense to Nicodemus...baptism, the Holy Spirit, God's kingdom. That night in our text when he came to see Jesus, he was inches away from the kingdom of God, and he didn't even know it. The kingdom is Jesus. That night Jesus may not have had much use for Nicodemus, but now He was dying for him on a cross. And something happened within Nicodemus. God's wind was blowing. It blew him to Pontius Pilate and he asked Pilate for the body of Jesus to bury it. And as Nicodemus took the body down from the cross and carried it to the tomb, he knew now that he was carrying in his hands the kingdom of God--his Lord and Savior who had opened His hands on a cross for him.

Friends, God's Spirit blew you here today for a reason. Isn't it because we are so much like Nicodemus? So full of questions, but not always liking the answers. Not wanting to lose control of our life, even if it is to God's leading. Like Nicodemus, we think we're teachers in the Faith, but we need to be taught again and again. Like Nicodemus, we think we have it all figured out, but often we are in the dark.

Nothing made sense to Nicodemus until Good Friday, and that is true also for us. Apart from the cross of Jesus, nothing makes sense--our troubles, our sicknesses, the tsunami, even what we are doing in God's kingdom. But look with Nicodemus at the cross of your Lord. See Him dying for you. See His wounds for your transgressions. Your baptism joins you to Him who is on the cross for you. Your place in God's kingdom is with Him who gave everything up for you. Your troubles and diseases were all carried by Christ for you. And He gives you life, real life. He forgives your sins, all of them. He forgives you even for living like those who are on the outside of His kingdom. And He forgives you for being on the inside looking out.

In a few minutes, like Nicodemus did, you will carry in your hands the kingdom of God as Jesus is placed there within the bread and wine of Holy Communion. And you are a part of God's kingdom, for He gives Himself to you. And later when you walk out those doors, God's Spirit will still be blowing. His Spirit will blow however He wishes in your life. But that's okay, because His will for you is always the best. And as you keep looking at the cross of Jesus, everything in your life will make perfect sense. Amen.