

## **"Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"**

John 3:1-17

Trinity Sunday, 7 June 2009

The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist

### **John 3:1-17**

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Prayer.

Have you ever been with another person,  
Such that both hear the same words,  
But each derives a different meaning?  
This past week  
I heard a former regulator  
Tell a illustrative tale in her address:  
People in a hot air balloon are swept up in a storm  
Coming out the other side of the wind, rain, and pitched darkness  
Into completely unfamiliar territory.  
They reduce altitude  
And spot a farmer standing in the middle of a wheat field below:

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"Where are we?" yelled the pilot.  
"You're in a balloon!" the farmer shouted back.  
Thinking of a better way to rephrase it  
The pilot shouted back again, "Where are you?"  
To which the farmer replied, "I'm in a wheat field!"  
Such is the case of Jesus and Nicodemus.

A leader of the Jews,  
Schooled in the law of Moses,  
Clandestinely approaches Jesus under the concealment of darkness  
Seeking understanding about signs;  
The signs that Jesus performs,  
Clearly in the mind of Nicodemus,  
Signs which show favor from God.  
The word in question  
Is spoken by Jesus:  
You must be born *anōthen*.  
This is one Greek adverb with multiple meanings.  
Nicodemus clearly hears it as "again,"  
As demonstrated with his silly follow-up question  
("How can anyone be born after having grown old?  
Can one enter a second time  
into the mother's womb and be born?"),  
While Jesus' continuing commentary clearly shows  
He meant it to be heard as "from above."<sup>1</sup>

"No one can enter the kingdom of God  
Without being born of water and Spirit," Jesus teaches.  
In other words,  
The only way into our Heavenly Father's kingdom  
Is to have one foot in this world  
And the other foot firmly planted in heaven.  
Being born of water = think "this world,"  
"Think the great flood with Noah and his ark,"  
"Think the Red Sea parting for Moses and the Hebrews,"  
"Think the baptisms of John the Baptist for repentance of sins."  
Being born of water  
Should cause one to consider  
how the God of creation

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<sup>1</sup> Considerable insight has been provided by: Sharon H. Ringe, Professor of New Testament, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC, as found at:  
[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect\\_date=6/7/2009#](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=6/7/2009#)

has a long history of rescuing God's people;  
saving us from our unrighteousness, warring intent, and sins of the flesh.  
But the world is not enough.  
Baptism by water is not enough.  
Perfect attendance in church isn't enough.  
Attending seminary and being ordained isn't enough.  
There is nothing humanly possible,  
No human effort, no righteous deed, no feat so worthy  
That will, on it's own, open the doors to the kingdom of heaven.  
"We are not saved by our works,"  
the apostle Paul correctly interprets the Gospel,  
"We are saved solely by the grace of God."  
And that grace is the Spirit.  
Being born of the Spirit = think the presence of Christ in the absence of his body.  
Think wind, Jesus tells us,  
"It blows where it chooses,"  
(which is to say Christ's mind is not our mind)  
"you hear the sound of it,"  
(our senses are aware of it's presence)  
"but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."  
(In other words,  
don't spent wasted time  
attempting to understand what the Spirit's next move may be,  
just let it go,  
let it be.  
Simply be aware;  
Watch for the signs,  
Listen for it's rustling,  
Follow where it leads.  
Let the Spirit guide you in the here and now.)

Not "again."  
"From above!"  
Baptized in this world,  
But adopted by the Spirit of Christ from above!  
Though we struggle in a world filled with sickness, sin, and death,  
The apostle Paul writes in his epistle to the church in Rome,  
We have not been abandoned.  
In Christ, God has adopted us  
As God's very own children and heirs.<sup>2</sup>  
We have not been left behind simply with a historical book about Jesus.  
We have been claimed and named,

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<sup>2</sup> With thanks to Elisabeth Johnson, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Watertown, MN

Bought and paid for,  
Accepted and included,  
into God's heavenly family.  
The power of adoption,  
Or *huiiothesia* in the Greek,  
Can not be over stated.  
Parents who have adopted children may understand somewhat.  
Adoptive children may understand to a point.  
It is one thing to give birth,  
It is something altogether different to intentional lay claim to a child,  
To gather them in and make them your own.  
That intentional will is but a taste,  
Just an inkling of,  
The enormous gift of love the Spirit represents.  
Grace is an order of magnitude beyond our comprehension.  
But we don't have to understand it,  
We simply can claim it,  
Live in it,  
Bathe in it,  
Drink it in.

Our scriptural lessons for today  
Help to paint a picture of our Triune God;  
A Father's love that created us,  
Made covenant with us,  
Taught us how to live,  
And hoped for our obedience;  
A Father's love who sent us his own Son  
As a gift to humankind,  
To forgive our sins  
And to save us into eternal life.  
A Son's love  
That refused to abandon us,  
But is willing to abide with us, and in us,  
By the presence and guidance of his Spirit,  
Who has adopted us as God's own,  
Linking us with Christ  
As fellow children and heirs of God,  
Enabling us to call upon God  
With the same intimacy Christ used:  
"Abba! Father!"  
even as he was lifted up upon a cross.

Dearly beloved,

**"Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"**

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This is a God that will not let us go.  
We are His children,  
Siblings with Christ,  
Heirs to the divine inheritance.  
Come,  
Take this bread.  
Drink this cup.  
Cry "Abba! Father!"  
And lay claim to God's grace  
Given to you.  
Amen.

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