

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2He 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." 3Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4Nicodemus 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?" 5Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8The 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." 9Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11"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. 12If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 16"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. 17"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.

I begin today talking about some people you know or may not know – some people that may be you or sitting just down the pew from you or that you would never meet in a hundred years. I start with someone far away:

I am an Aids orphan though at four years old I do not know that is what you would call me. My mother was dying already when I was born, my father died soon thereafter. My medical chart if I had one would tell you I will soon follow them. The few who are left in my village are caring for me – a little food each day – shelter from the rain. I have never heard of a god – I never will in this life. But if I could think of a being who has called me into this life I would think of a cruel and sadistic one. For what sort of being would call me into the pain and suffering and hollow emptiness I have known.

I am a sixty year old man – I have never been sick a day in my life. God is good. God is love. That is what I tell my children and grandchildren. What beautiful people they all are - bright, talented, attractive. I am so proud of them all. I love life. What a wonderful God we have.

I am a woman. My husband tells me I am the cause of his drinking. If only I would change then he could be everything I want him to be. I live for my children –I myself am not deserving of much. Maybe they will escape the pain that was in the home I grew up in, the pain that is in this home. I know it is up to me – if I try harder - do better - I can make them more than I am. That is my hope - that is my life. They say God is forgiving but I mostly feel guilty, am guilty. So much is my fault, the fighting that went on between my parents – the shouting and hurting that is everywhere in my days and nights. I think God is not paying much attention.

I am ninety-five. I've had a good life. I worked hard, prayed, hoped in God. Soon I will die. I hope that God has prepared another life for me. Right now that is what really matters – life beyond death. For unless I live once more I will be like a summer flower, blooming and then fading – gone – forgotten.

I am alone – lonely – needing someone to talk to. I walk among crowds, eat in crowded restaurants, sit in churches among other peoples families. I have conversations at work but I am alone. I long for a god to walk with me, to know me as no person on earth has known me.

God? Who needs a god? I will count on me. I can think my way through any dilemma – work my way through any crisis – charm my way through any situation. Look at me – why would I ever need a god?

How many more could I speak of? Thousands – millions – billions?

All with one God - whether they acknowledge God or not they are all created by one God – sustained by one God – loved by one God. One God in three persons.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Creating, guiding, ruling, serving, suffering, dying, rising, inspiring, saving.

Seen by Isaiah in his vision – the mighty God, the Holy God whose robe is so vast that the temple in Jerusalem is filled by hem at the bottom.

Loving so much that he gave his only Son in order to save the whole world.

Listening to hear a child cry “Abba(Daddy) Father. Hearing every child’s cry and your cry too.

Received into this world from Mary's womb, resting in manger bed.

Walking dusty Galilean roads – teaching, healing, casting out demons.

Hanging naked before his mockers until the weight of all sins crushed his life.

And raised. Ever alive – ever love – ever life for you.

And in you through the Spirit.

Hearing the prayers you have not even prayed – knowing your heart and your hurts.

Spirit - journeying throughout the world in words of every continent – every dialect – a word of forgiving and power and birthing faith.

Spirit -- able to make a home in everyone – each of those with whom I began – not a god far off but a God dwelling within.

“Very truly I tell you,” said Jesus, “no one can enter the kingdom of God with being born of water and the spirit.”

Water and a word, “ I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,” and the God who is spirit has found another home, claimed a life, claimed another beautiful temple.

You are the temple of the Spirit of the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God will never be satisfied until everyone is. Amen.