

*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.*

If I had known what was happening I would have resisted with all my might. It was the best life I had ever known until that day. All my nourishment came without any effort on my part. Never too warm, never too cold, protected – I had it great. But then came the moment when I was expelled from the only home I had ever known. Tremendous pressures bearing down on me – squeezing, compressing. Suddenly everything I had known in my whole existence was gone – everything was new. I was born.

It is impossible to teach a fetus how to be born. The mother can be taught to breathe, to bear down. The father can be trained to coach and support her as she does the work of birthing, The nurses, midwife or doctor assist in many ways but the fetus does nothing.

How strange that when Jesus wanted to teach about the way God saves he used the image of birth. Would not the image of construction be more appropriate? First, you lay the foundation, then you add the frame, the roof joists and so on. Step by step until the work is complete. Then we could teach the whole process here and everyone could be sure how each was doing. I think that is what Nicodemus came seeking that night. But immediately Jesus was talking about being born.

“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Now Nicodemus heard Jesus’ words as if Jesus was telling Nicodemus what he needed to do. So he asked, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born? Nicodemus was asking how someone could do this being born from above or born again as it is often translated. Nicodemus recognized that someone cannot do that. But maybe he was not thinking so much about what God could do.

Do you know how that is – to think about a problem with your mind churning over what you can do – and forgetting to even consider what God might be able to do?

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is spirit.”

Jesus was not telling Nicodemus that being born of the Spirit was one way to get into the Kingdom of God, but the only way. “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.”

When I was young I was taught that Jesus was talking about baptism here. Water – Spirit – baptism is where they come together. When I was in seminary I was taught that water here is a reference to our human birth out of the watery womb.

I do not know whether Jesus was talking about baptism or not. But I am sure he was making a point about our entering the kingdom of God, not as something we can do for ourselves but as something that God does. For Jesus continued: “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.”

We feel the wind – we see its effects but we have no power over it. Like birth it happens to us.

That day at least Nicodemus did not seem to get it. I sympathize with him. I want to know what I have to do. I want to know what to tell you to do to be in God’s kingdom. But Jesus talks about birth and the wind.

The second lesson today speaks of Abraham. God chose him. Why him? God never gives a reason. Oh, the scriptures make it clear that there were some reasons God should not have chosen him. A couple of times when he was afraid he passed his wife off as his sister – he feared that if they knew he was the husband of this beautiful woman that they would kill him and take her. Not a very noble man, Abraham. But God chose him.

Abraham believed that God chose him.

The question for your life and mine is whether we will believe that God has chosen us - chosen you not because of anything you have done or said or will do or say or be - simply chosen you - chosen me in the very same way.

Why us? The only answer we have today is John 3:16: God's love. "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." God chose you for this birth from above – God chose to blow the wind of God's Spirit right into your heart – God chose you because God loves you. Believe it. God sent his Son to die on the cross because God loves the whole world.

So what can we do? Count on God. Hope in God. Trust in God. Believe that right in the center of all that is and all that will be is God's love. Jesus.