

*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 grew up in an old farmhouse. But through the years it was remodeled – first the living room and dining room – walls opened up and a staircase also – boxy little rooms turned into an open space. Later a porch became a kitchen – with a stone fireplace open on two sides and what we called the old house became an attached garage. Later still wood siding was replaced by aluminum siding – an unfinished basement clad in paneling. The old house seemed new and modern. But within the walls, below in the foundation it was an old house still.

Maybe Nicodemus came to Jesus that night looking for a little spiritual remodeling. He was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews. He had a firm foundation for his faith. But he had heard about the signs Jesus had done. Water changed into wine – healing – later it would be thousands fed with a five loaves and two fish. Many believed in Jesus name because they saw the signs he did. Under the cover of darkness Nicodemus came to see Jesus. What was going in Nicodemus' life? Was his wife sick? Was he worried about continuing tension in the politics of his land? Had his love for God grown cold? Something brought him to Jesus.

What opens you up to Jesus today? An earthquake and tsunami that shook your confidence? Troubles at home? A change in the health of one you love? An emptiness inside?

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do the signs that you do apart from God.”

Surely Jesus will be pleased with that statement – Nicodemus has said that Jesus is from God – he is opening the door of his faith to Jesus – inviting Jesus in. So how does Jesus respond?

“No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” It is like Jesus had not even heard what Nicodemus has said but is starting a whole new conversation.

Since the words for born from above can also mean born again Nicodemus asks, “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.”

Back and forth it goes – Nicodemus tries to fit Jesus into the structure of what Nicodemus knows and believes – Jesus seems to continually change the subject. Jesus and Nicodemus are like two toddlers at parallel play – together but each doing their own thing – really not relating to one another.

Nicodemus wants to remodel his house of faith. Jesus in talking about being born again or from above is talking about a brand new structure. And with his next words Jesus makes it clear that Nicodemus will not be the builder.

Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” The wind blows where 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.

What do you hope to hear in this sermon? Some helpful words that will spruce up a dusty corner in your house of faith? Or even some minor remodeling? Are you asking Jesus to be compatible with the furnishings you have already picked out? His teachings expected to conform to the floor plan of your house of faith? Jesus made

clear to Nicodemus that God's Spirit is the one in charge, giving birth from above. Nicodemus' house of faith needed to be torn down so that the Spirit might give him a new dwelling – Jesus.

Nicodemus came to Jesus stating what he knew about Jesus but the Spirit was calling him to believe in Jesus. And calling you to believe in Jesus as well.

Sometimes life tears down our house of faith. The structure we have made for ourselves cannot withstand the quaking of grief or the waves that sweep our faith in God out to sea. Then it is that the wind of the Spirit blows through us and new faith is born – not out of our power and strength but into our emptiness. God's work - and we cannot even understand how it happened. We only know that we are grateful.

When we open our lives to God's word the same happens. God's word tears down every confidence in what we make of ourselves and gives us confidence in what God is doing in us through Christ. Jesus does not remodel – he builds new. Baptism is the beginning of Jesus building in us for it is the work of God's Spirit and not our work. What God builds will endure – what we patch together for ourselves will not. Those who are born of water and the Spirit enter the kingdom of God. Amen.