

This interaction between Nicodemus and Jesus is rather complicated theologically. It is complicated because Jesus couches much of his discussion using metaphors and images that are quite heady. You must be born again in the Spirit and with water. And the Spirit blows wherever it wills. There is a difference between earthly things and heavenly things. And there's something about lifting up a snake. And then we get, arguably, one of the most famous biblical verses in all of Scripture. It's so well known that we need only mention it by its chapter and verse and people immediately know the rest. John 3:16. For God so loved the world...And yet, because it is so well known, we often think that we completely understand what John is saying here without giving it much thought. We talk about this passage as if it exists on its own, and not part of a larger story. All that is to say that there is a lot going on in John chapter 3. After reading this passage, we might even be wondering along with Nicodemus, "How is this even possible?" What are you talking about Jesus?

Jesus is clueing us in on what it means to be a Christian, in these verses. As a Christian, we are being called to live differently than the rest of the world. As Christians, Jesus is reminding us that we are called to be guided by the Holy Spirit and to live our life according to the law of Love. This morning I want to take a few moments and expand on these two ideas. First, as Christians, in the waters of Baptism, the Holy Spirit guides us into our ministry and our new life. Second, as Christians, because God so loved the world, we are called to show that love to the world in all that we do. So, let us journey through this passage, shall we?

First, as Christians, in the waters of Baptism, the Holy Spirit guides us into our ministry and our new life. Jesus spends a good chunk of today's passage with Nicodemus talking about being born again in the Spirit. This seems to be a sticking point for Nicodemus. He doesn't follow what Jesus is saying here. How can I be born again? I am an old man. I cannot be born again by my mother, Jesus. These are all very logical statements and questions. On the surface, logical level of things, Nicodemus is absolutely right. We cannot be reborn from our mother's womb. But Jesus isn't talking about a literal rebirth from our mother's womb. Rather, Jesus is telling us about what it means to be baptized and to follow him. We are not reborn from our mother's wombs, but we are transformed and changed in the waters of Baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are called to live a new life centered on Christ and love. We no longer live a life centered on ourselves alone. Christ calls us in the waters of baptism into ministry and new life.

It was in the waters of Baptism that Jesus was called God's beloved child. And it was after rising up out of the waters that Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. Baptism is a public affirmation that we are a child of God. It is also when we receive our calling from Christ to go out into the world. We are given our identity as a beloved child of God and transformed and sent out into the world to transform the world through the water of Baptism and through the power of the Holy Spirit. This what Jesus is reminding Nicodemus about in this morning's passage: we are claimed and loved and we are transformed and sent in the waters of Baptism and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This leads me to my second point for this morning. As Christians, because God so loved the world, we are called to show that love to the world in all that we do. Jesus reminds us in John 3:16 that God so loved the world that God sent us Jesus. And in verse 17, we are reminded that just as Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn it, then neither are we in a position to condemn nor judge the world. The new life centered on Christ is one that calls people to experience the love of God, the love that is so deep and so wide that it encompasses the entire world and everyone in it. And if that is the case that God so loves the world, then we too are called to love the whole world. In the waters of Baptism we are called to a new life in Christ centered on love.

You might be wondering what this new life guided by the Holy Spirit and centered on love looks like? Well, I think Scriptures give us a clue about what a new life guided by the Holy Spirit looks like. Last week we saw Jesus resist the temptations to rely upon his own power, but to trust in God's power. So, maybe new life in Christ means putting our trust in God rather than trusting our own abilities alone to get through tough times. And we see throughout the Gospels Jesus healing and teaching and forgiving and loving people that the rest of society ignored. He heals a woman with a blood disease and reminds us to pull the plank out of our own eyes before we judge others, and he tells the mob to the one without sin cast

the first stone. So maybe living the new life transformed by the Holy Spirit is one of healing and wholeness and reconciliation rather than ignorance and rejection and condemnation of those who are different. All of Scriptures point the way for what it means to be born again in Christ. It's not just about having the right belief set. It's about putting our faith into action.

This second Sunday of Lent, I encourage you to examine the ways that we as a congregation and we as individual disciples can live into our new lives centered on the love of God. What are some ways that we can proclaim God's deep and expansive love in the world? We can minister to people in need by sharing out of our abundance during the can-a-thon next Sunday. We can invite a friend to come to church and truly welcome them into our midst. We can call up an old friend we haven't talked to in a while. We can begin the process of forgiveness that I talked about a couple weeks ago with that person you are struggling to forgive. There are many ways that we can live into this new life centered on Christ's love. I encourage us to spend Lent really digging into Scriptures and prayer in the hopes that we continually are transformed by the expansive love of God. Amen and amen.