



“Are You Dying...To Be Newly Born?”

Second Sunday In Lent

Saturday & Sunday – March 7 & 8, 2020

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121;

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Last Saturday I had the opportunity to go over to the Farm Show in the company of my daughter to the show it had to do with a horse theme and my daughter has been into horses since she was about that high.

It all began when a member of my congregation at the time invited us to the horse farm where he was the barn manager. In particular he invited us into one of the barns that had thoroughbreds that were about to give birth, and he said to us, would you like to see one of the horses being born? And of course, I jumped on that, I said that would be awesome. Well ok, he said, this is how this has to work. You got to leave your shoes by the door and leave your jackets by the door because when I call you you need to get here in five to ten minutes because you never know when a horse is going to be born. You can't predict it, it's gonna happen and it's gonna come quick and you have to immediately get over to the barn in order to be able to see it. And sure, enough after dinner around seven thirty at night we get the phone call, we were ready. We throw on our shoes, we throw on our jackets, we go there, and we were able to see a horse being born. It was born within ten minutes of us getting there, so it was that time frame that he was talking about. You never know when a horse is going to be born. And you never know when we're going to be born or when we're going to be born a new.

Every single one of us is on a journey of believing. We have this gospel story of Jesus meeting with Nikodemus at night. Now the gospel writer portrays John as a Pharisee who was part of the ruling class of Judea. He's part of the religious council The Sanhedrin. We can guess that he's probably wealthy if he were on that council and Jesus addresses him as a preeminent teacher of Jerusalem. Why is he there? Think about that. He has everything that he could possibly need. He has a great education matter of fact historians seem to feel that he studied under one of the preeminent rabbis of the day. He is a religious authority, even Jesus calls him a teacher of Israel. He has political power because he is part of the religious council, the Sanhedrin, and he has the respect of the people. He's in a good family and he has all of the right connections to be in the position that he is in.

But why does he come to Jesus? Was it because of devotion or duty, maybe he wants to learn more about Jesus' intention with his religious tradition, or perhaps it's curiosity?

He is after all an older religious teacher, maybe he really wants to learn something about this new teaching of Jesus. Or perhaps it's just confusion, he really wants to understand Jesus and what he is about or perhaps it is conviction, maybe he sees in Jesus the power of God at work in the world and he comes by night, why? Did he have a busy day and he just got around to it, or maybe he doesn't want anybody to see him visiting Jesus. Perhaps he's embarrassed, or maybe on the positive side maybe he just knows that Jesus has been surrounded by crowds and if he goes at night, he'll be able to have some quality one on one time with Jesus.

Maybe Nikodemus comes to Jesus because he was searching for an authentic voice from God and he knew that that was very rare indeed. And so, to find that voice from God the established teacher must become a learner and open himself up to the wind of the Holy Spirit. I think that's probably why Jesus immediately goes into this excursion of talking about the Spirit. Now the word in Greek here is *Pneuma*, and it has a number of different qualities or definitions. The first of course is that it is the Spirit, but also it could be understood as the wind, or breath. Like the wind, the spirit has free movement, it can go wherever it wills whenever it wills, and like reviving breath, the Spirit of God has power, the power to give life. We don't know the origin of the wind or its destination and we can't control the Spirit, and if we try to it just ends up in disappointment for ourselves.

Historically I think of the Roman Catholic Churches desire to stamp down the early reformation and how it ended up in a world full of different denominations. Instead, Jesus is saying we must be open to the Spirit, we must be open to being born a new in the Spirit every single day, every single moment.

Lutheran Pastor Edward Markquart put it this way, it means to have the love of Christ, the joy of Christ, the peace of Christ, the patience of Christ, the kindness of Christ, the goodness of Christ, the faithfulness of Christ, the gentleness of Christ, the self-control of Christ living in us. It is having the Spirit of Christ taking up residence in us and living within us. It means for you and for me to have faith. We are transformed when we meet Jesus and the Spirit of God is radical and the life in the Spirit is radical. We are changed, and unlike Judas, the betrayer of Jesus who moves from the light of Christ into the darkness, Nikodemus moves from the darkness into the light.

At the end of John's gospel, he will be at the cross with Joseph of Arimathea taking down the body of Jesus from the cross and tenderly caring for him. The devoted, the curious, the confused, or the convicted come to Jesus and are changed. We take hope in the darkness of the world and we see Jesus as the light of the world.

Two thousand years ago, God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him would not perish but would have eternal life so that the world might be saved through him. No matter where you are on your spiritual journey of believing, Jesus promises his Spirit to lead and guide you along the way and he invites us to be born a new in the Spirit of love and mercy. So, come to him with your questions. Come to him with your hopes. Come to him with your dreams. Trust in Jesus be like a child opening, questioning, trusting, embracing. Follow him, love God and love people following his great command. Listen to his voice and know him, really get

to know him, not just in a factual way, but in a personal way. Come to him and know him intimately in prayer, in worship, and in the sacrament of holy communion. Say yes to the Spirit of Christ and his will for your life. Say yes and embrace your journey of believing. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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