

Sermon for Trinity Sunday

The Word of God for this Sermon is written in John 3, 1-15

Let us pray: *Come Holy Spirit, give us ears that can hear and give us Your Spirit so that we may see Your Kingdom. Amen.*

Dear Congregation in Christ! Here comes Nicodemus, a Rabbi, one of the members of the Sanhedrin, the leading council of the Jews. A friendly Rabbi, who thinks highly of Jesus. He calls Him 'Rabbi'. Nicodemus is serious, he has no hidden agenda. He comes for a discussion with Jesus, by night. That means he didn't want others of the council to see him.

He pays tribute to Jesus, or so he thinks, by saying [2]: *"We know that you are a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."* He acknowledges Jesus as teacher come from God, because of *the signs* Jesus had done. Here is a man who comes to Jesus from Rabbi to Rabbi to have a good discussion about the kingdom of God. 'You know God, I know God, let us find common ground here. Let us sort things out here.'

Yet, Jesus cuts him off immediately. Instead of latching onto what Nicodemus had to say, He spoke a confession in the strongest terms: *"Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless one is born again / from above he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Nicodemus didn't know what Jesus was talking about and said: *"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"* Nicodemus didn't understand the term 'birth' here in this regard. The only birth he knew of was the physical birth which happened in the mother's womb. And how could anyone then climb back in their mother's womb and be born once again. Now Jesus clarified the term *"anothen"* which can mean "again" or "from above"!

[5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

These two statements of Jesus are exactly parallel to one another. 'Born from above' is the same as 'born by means of water and the Spirit'. Whoever is not born from

above, not born by means of water and the Spirit, CANNOT see nor enter the Kingdom of heaven. It is impossible to see or enter the kingdom of God without this new birth.

The good news is: Whoever is born by means of water and the Spirit enters the Kingdom of Heaven and will see the kingdom of God. What an amazing possibility! This second birth makes one into a new being. Jesus says it like this [6]: *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."* The whole person born by means of human parents, body & soul, is flesh. The whole person born by means of the Spirit is Spirit.

Paul says, through the new birth you become a new creation! The new birth is completely the work of the Holy Spirit! You cannot enter Jesus' kingdom by your own strong willed decision, nor by your good works nor anything in you or by means of yourself (see John 1,13). The new Birth is completely taken out of your hands out of your capacity and God is doing it for you. It is absolutely God's work. Already the term "to be born" clarifies that, because nobody has ever born him/her self. It is good news for us, because whatever God does is certain, is proper, is which we can rely on! And therefore it doesn't need to be repeated, ever. It counts for you. Can you loose your inheritance or walk away from it later? Yes, you can, but God is going to follow you, to pursue you with His Grace, to remind you whose child you are!

Let us return to Nicodemus. Jesus said to him [7]: *"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You (plural) must be born again.'*" This birth from above is necessary for all you Pharisees! They thought they knew God. They thought they were in the kingdom of God already, because of their earthly descendancy from Abraham. Jesus spoke this to him.

Nicodemus asked the classic question, how can this happen, or be? He doesn't know! Jesus answered and said: *"You are the teacher of Israel and you don't know that?"* Jesus answers with another Amen, Amen statement: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony."* What is Jesus saying here, what is He referring to? Who is this "we"? [1,33-34] John the Baptiser said the following: *"I myself did not*

know Him, but He who sent me to baptise with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptises with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." He referred to Jesus' Baptism! That was the one thing the Pharisees would not accept, the Baptism of John as coming from God and therefore they also denied Jesus' Baptism. Nicodemus did not mention it as revealing who Jesus is. He only referred to the miracles. But it was the Baptism of Jesus which above all authorised that Jesus is the anointed Son of Man, the Messiah!

Whoever denies the Baptism of John denies the Baptism of Jesus and therefore also denies the whole mission of Jesus who came to save the world in His Way. Through Baptism we become the children of God. And it is easier for the children than for Nicodemus, because Nicodemus already had a false idea of God and His Kingdom in His head. That is why Jesus stopped him in his tracks and showed him that he knew nothing. He did not know God although he thought he did. He did not see the Kingdom of God sitting right in front of him. He looked at the Body of Christ but did not recognise Him as such. He was clinging to his wrong tradition. Later on we see that his attitude did change.

Now there is one last thing we need to address in closing. In John 1,12 we hear the following: *"But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."* Now here he speaks of "becoming" children. This does not stand against the fact that we are children of God. We become what we are. So we grow into who we are as long as we live! Baptism is not only for the day of Baptism. It carries on. Each day we take our old Adam's cloth off and put on the white garment of Jesus by hearing His Word, by receiving His forgiveness. Constantly we need to be reminded of who we are so that we will start and continue to live like God's children. We need to hear the Gospel everyday so that we will start to love and understand His commandments, His means of Grace and regularly make use of them in His Body. We hear His word often so that we are reminded to pray and praise God for all His gifts.

Baptism is the beginning of a new life, lived before God, in His Kingdom, and He in

us. It is also the burial of our old Adam and his ways, his time management. We have a new Lord who determines our priorities but most of all who gives Himself to us. We are not losing out on anything substantial if we rather assemble with Him than follow our worldly desires. This is something we have to battle with. It feels like we are losing out. But little do we know what real godly joy looks like and is like. Where can you get a good conscience, cleansed, knowing that Your Father in heaven has declared peace with you and placed His name on you and follows you with His grace especially in difficult times? Jesus reveals and shows us the Father. Therefore, let us altogether abide in God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit! **Amen.**

*"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. **Amen.**" (ESV Eph 3,20-21).*

Pastor Kurt Schnackenberg, Shelly Beach LC