



CNI

Trinity Sunday - Born again

John 3:1-17

3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.

3:2 He 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."

3:3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

3:4 Nicodemus 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?"

3:5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

3:6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

3:7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'

3:8 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."

3:9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

3:10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

3:11 "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.

3:12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

3:14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

3:15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

3:16 "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.

3:17 "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.

Trinity Sunday... is a day to celebrate the greatest mystery of all... a day to ponder the dynamics of one God in three divine persons. The Gospel of John's exposition of The Trinity grows out of a conversation Jesus is having with Nicodemus, a righteous scholar, totally committed to a life governed by Mosaic Law. He respects Jesus, but he is puzzled by him. Seriously now, how can we be born again?

The original King James Version of this gospel uses the term "born again." Later editions use the term "born from above." Both translations are consistent with the Greek text and with Christ's message. We must be "born again." But as Jesus explains to a skeptical Nicodemus, our rebirth is not the product of our mother's labour. It is not a birth into this finite, earthly life. It is a birth in the Spirit into everlasting life. Our new life doesn't come through fertilisation and gestation. It is a direct gift from God... a rebirth in water and the Spirit... made possible by the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As such, we are not only "born again" ... we are "born from above."

In certain "sophisticated" circles, the term "born again" has fallen out of favour. It has become synonymous with a naïve fundamentalism... a rejection of science... an inability to process

nuance... a narrow, intolerant world view. Yet Jesus tells us we must be born again. And he is none of these things. He is the Resurrection and the Life... the embodiment of regeneration through grace... the vehicle of our salvation.

To be born means to breathe oxygen directly into our lungs, to begin to take and process nourishment on our own. To be born again means to breathe in the Holy Spirit, to begin a lifetime of ingesting and processing grace. Our birth and our re-birth are not random events. They are carefully crafted components of God's plan for Creation. And as such they involve God in totality: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Father is the Author of Creation... including ours. He delights in us. We are his beloved. Of the millions of species that inhabit the earth, only we are created in God's image and likeness; only we are given the knowledge of good and evil; only we possess immortal souls.

In our sins God never has and never will abandon us. He sent us Jesus Christ, the embodiment of divine love to lead us to salvation. That mystery of faith... that simple, all-powerful truth... is declared in this gospel in a single verse that thrills Christians to this day: *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.

This gospel illustrates The Trinity at work in the world and at work in us. Creation and Redemption are those gifts of God that are most familiar. But it is Inspiration... the gift of the Holy Spirit that is the focus of this gospel. To be born again is to be born of the Holy Spirit. While the waters of Baptism cleanse us of collective and individual guilt, the Holy Spirit literally inspires us... breathing God's grace into the spiritual void that was our soul. It is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us who is God's agent of influence from the moment of Baptism to our final breath. We may neglect that presence. We may ignore that influence. But the Holy Spirit never neglects or ignores us.

In praying over this gospel I looked to the insights of the great Doctors of the Church... to Augustine and Aquinas. But it was a little noted remark by Brother Lawrence that moved me most. Lawrence was a humble friar who spent his life in the kitchen and dining room of his monastery, serving and cleaning-up after his priestly and scholarly superiors. He embraced his role and made his every act a prayer to the glory of God. He saw the inspiration, the breath of the Holy Spirit as a powerful wind at his back

propelling him forward every day in the service of God.

As we pray the Creed this Trinity Sunday, as we say: “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” we proclaim that there is a living God infused in us propelling us forward in his service. We declare that in the Spirit we are born again... that we are one with The Three.