

“Can You See?” A sermon by Lee Ireland
Cathedral City Community Presbyterian Church
May 27, 2018 Pentecost
John 3:1-17

Let us pray together: Open our eyes to see your Spirit in our life. Open our hearts to receive the blessings you send each day. Guide us with your wisdom so that through us Christ may walk on the earth once again. Amen.

Song – Barbra Streisand – On A Clear Day – Let’s all sing this together. And I’ve altered the words so you might want to watch the screen.

On a clear day, rise and look around you and you’ll see who you are.
On a clear day, how it will astound you that the glow of God’s being outshines every star.
You feel part of every mountain, sea and shore.
You can see, from far and near, a world you’ve never seen before.

Some of you are wondering why we started out this sermon singing, On A Clear Day. For me, the issue in today’s reading is not about being born again and the confusion that caused Nicodemus and, perhaps you. This story from John is about seeing. Do you see the world differently because of your faith? Or are you like Nicodemus who couldn’t see Jesus, the Son of God, standing right in front of him?

Let’s look more closely at this story of Nicodemus’ nighttime visit to Jesus. Who is the guy named Nicodemus? Do we hear about him later in the Bible? Yes, in John chapter 7, Nicodemus defends Jesus before the chief priests and Pharisees when these folks try to have Jesus arrested. The third time we read about Nicodemus is probably the one most of you are familiar with. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea prepare Jesus’ body for burial with 100 pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

Our reading today is the first time we encounter Nicodemus in the Bible and he seems clueless, doesn’t he? Let’s read through this scripture together. This side of the church can be Nicodemus and this side can be Jesus. I’ve put the dialog on the screen for you to read.

Setting the stage: Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. (Address the Nicodemus side of the church.) Why would you come by night? You’re a member of the Jewish ruling council! Your colleagues, the chief priests and Pharisees, don’t like Jesus. He’s upsetting their status quo. It would be dangerous for you if anyone knew you came to talk to Jesus. It could jeopardize your position in the religious hierarchy.

What does Nicodemus say to Jesus. It’s on the screen. **“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”**

Nicodemus thinks Jesus is from God, just not the Son of God. Nicodemus recognizes the miracles Jesus does as coming from God. Nicodemus thinks of Jesus as an earthly Rabbi rather than the Messiah.

How does Jesus answer Nicodemus? (Address the Jesus side of the church.) It's on the screen. **“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”**

Nicodemus is probably thinking to himself, “What is this guy saying? I’m confused!” But Nicodemus stays in the conversation, taking Jesus’ comments literally.

It's on the screen. Nicodemus says. **“How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”**

Jesus stays with this topic of being born again. Ok, Jesus folk. What Jesus said to Nicodemus is on the screen: **“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”**

In the common language of today, Nicodemus would have said, “What?” But Nicodemus is a cultured, educated religious leader who asks: **“How can this be?”**

I think Nicodemus is totally confused at this point and is asking Jesus to explain. Nicodemus has taken Jesus’ words literally. Jesus is not speaking literally, but spiritually, symbolically.

Let me read what Jesus said to Nicodemus. **“You are Israel’s teacher, and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God**

did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

In the words I just read, Jesus tries to straighten out Nicodemus by telling him that, as an educated and knowledgeable person, Nicodemus ought to understand what Jesus is saying. But Nicodemus was blinded by his rules and regulation and laws and missed seeing the Son of God in his presence.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that he, Jesus, came from God. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he, Jesus, will die on the cross and those who look to that cross will have eternal life. Nicodemus would have understood this reference because he knows the story that happened in the wilderness during the Exodus when the people were being bitten by poisonous snakes and dying. Moses, the leader of the people, made a cross with a bronze snake on it and put it on a pole. Those that had been bitten by a poisonous snake only needed to look at the cross to live.

Then Jesus tells Nicodemus why Jesus came into the world – John 3:16. Let's say that verse together: **For God so loved that world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

Nicodemus could not see Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, even though Jesus was standing right in front of him. What kept him from seeing? Probably the law he lived under and didn't question. Religion often becomes a matter of correct practice in worship and correct observances of holy days. When these practices become routine and rigid, they can inhibit spiritual growth, spiritual sensitivity.

I hope that that is not the case for anyone sitting in this room today.

When you see Jesus as the Son of God, as the Messiah, as from God, your perspective changes, you see things differently. God, through Christ, wants to reclaim, rename, reauthor the story of your life. That new life is empowered by the grace of God freely given to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When you realize Christ's life, death, and resurrection is God's gift to you, you see life differently.

What do you see? How do you describe Jesus and understand yourself in relationship to him? How do you tell others about Jesus? A better question may be do you tell others about Jesus? I hope you see the kingdom of God right in front of you, all around you, and always with you.

When you do, everyday is a clear day, you can see from far and near. You can see forever – into eternity with God.