

The title for today's message is; ***Are you born again***

Jesus said; ***unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.***"

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ Aman.

Today's Gospel is one of those readings that reminds us that not all Pharisees were hypocrites. Some were genuine and Nicodemus was one of the genuine ones.

Some of the Pharisees were convinced that Jesus was a trouble maker ... a problem ... that Jesus was evil.

On the other hand, there were the eye-witness accounts of miracles, powerful preaching, and personal integrity.

Perhaps Nicodemus felt it was his duty as a leader in the community to see Jesus first-hand ... to reconcile these conflicting accounts of Jesus.

We don't know exactly why Nicodemus came to see Jesus, but we do know that Nicodemus approached Jesus with courtesy.

Yet, there are people who criticize Nicodemus for coming to Jesus by night. They suggest that Nicodemus did not want his fellow Pharisees to see him with Jesus.

He was afraid of what they might think. They might be right, but we should also consider the possibility that Nicodemus was an important man and had a busy schedule.

It may be that he worked all day and instead of going home to his nice comfy bed, he came out in search of the truth about Jesus.

Either way, Nicodemus came out to see Jesus. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, ***“Rabbi, 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.”***

These words show that Nicodemus respected Jesus and was ready to listen and learn from Him.

While these words show that Nicodemus had great respect for Jesus, they do not indicate that Nicodemus believed that Jesus was the Christ ... the Son of God.

Jesus obliged Nicodemus by beginning to teach him. Jesus answered him, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”***

With these words, Jesus taught that you must be born into the kingdom of God. This is very important. You do not decide to be born.

That decision is out of your hands. The words born again tell us that we have no say in entering the kingdom of God.

It is something that happens to us. Martin Luther had an excellent illustration for this. In one of his sermons, he preached, “Let me illustrate.

A child which is to be born two years from now is still nonexistent. At present the maiden who is to carry and bear the child is still unmarried.

The child which is to be born of her is nothing and can do nothing. Everyone must admit that one can do nothing until one has life.

Therefore all works, however precious and fine they may be, are absolutely nothing if performed before regeneration; they are nothing but sin and death.

Consequently, the Lord Christ judges that Nicodemus and all the Pharisees,

A nation who does not accept Christ and believe in Him, are nothing at all; for they are not yet reborn.

One thing that we must NOT do is give any one the impression that they can decide to be born again or that they can put any work into being born again.

Just as you had no say in when your mother gave birth to you, so we have no say in when we are born into the family of God.

Apparently, Nicodemus was not ready for this teaching. It confused him. Much to his credit, he was not ashamed to ask Jesus to explain.

Nicodemus said to him, ***“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”***

Certainly Nicodemus did not think that Jesus really meant that a person had to shrink down and crawl back into his mother.

But Nicodemus could think of no other meaning to the idea of rebirth. Nicodemus was honorable enough to admit that he did not understand what Jesus meant.

Jesus answered, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”***

These words teach Nicodemus and us that Jesus was not speaking about physical birth.

He was speaking about re-birth from the death of trespasses and sins that the Apostle Paul spoke of when he taught in Ephesians chapter 2, ***“You were dead in the trespasses and sins.”***

This is coming to life from the death of sin. When Jesus said, ***“Unless one is***

Jesus acknowledged that Nicodemus was a man of great learning ... that people respected him ... that he was a teacher in Israel.

Never the less, he did not understand these teachings. All of his learning did not prepare him for the truth that Jesus had for him.

Jesus went on to say, ***“Truly, truly, 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. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”***

Here is the reason that Nicodemus struggled. When Jesus said, “We speak of what we know,” He was speaking for all the inspired authors of Holy Scripture.

When Jesus said, “You do not receive our testimony,” He was telling Nicodemus that he and the other religious leaders in Israel did not receive the testimony of Holy Scripture.

That is the reason that Nicodemus, despite his great learning, struggled to understand the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus then gave Nicodemus an example of the proper way to receive the teachings of Holy Scripture.

He said, ***“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”***

These words help Nicodemus understand the meaning of the title Son of Man as Jesus used it. The title Son of Man means more than just a mere human being.

It means the person who freely descends from and ascends into heaven. This can only be the person who is God descended from heaven in human flesh.

After Jesus explained what He meant by the title Son of Man, He went on to use one of the events recorded in Holy Scripture to show how God works salvation among His people.

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the time that poisonous snakes attacked the Israelites in the wilderness.

God instructed Moses to make a replica of the snakes and put it up on a pole. The people who believed God's promise looked upon the serpent on the pole and God healed their snake bites.

Jesus taught Nicodemus that this is a model of how God saves. He said, ***“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.***

Jesus told Nicodemus that the Son of Man lifted up on the cross will save people from eternal punishment just as the serpent lifted up on the pole saved people from poisonous snakes.

Here is the proclamation of the Gospel to Nicodemus. Eternal life comes from the Son of Man who will suffer and die on a cross.

Jesus then reinforced this Gospel with the words that most of us know by heart. ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”***

It is in the middle of this conversation with Nicodemus that these words take on their full meaning.

God sent His Son into the world to be lifted up on the cross in the same way that Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

In this conversation, Jesus gave Nicodemus a lot to think about – more than we have time to consider today.

He explained that it is the new birth by the Holy Spirit that gives us the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation that the Son earned for us on the cross.

He proclaimed the Father's love that He sacrificed His only begotten Son for us.

With these words, Jesus explained that the Kingdom of God does not come to Nicodemus by anything that Nicodemus does, but because the Holy Spirit works saving faith in him.

We do not know the exact moment when the Holy Spirit converted Nicodemus, but we do know that the Holy Spirit used Jesus' words as He always does.

Eventually, Nicodemus experienced the new birth as the Holy Spirit established faith in him.

After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea, ... asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission ... Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night.

He came bringing a mixture of myrrh and spices, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So, ... they laid Jesus there.

Nicodemus helped Joseph place Jesus' body in the tomb and what a joy it must have been when Nicodemus learned that the body he had laid in

That his savior Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. What a joy it is for Nicodemus that he will forever enjoy the Kingdom of God that he received through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith.

What a joy it is for us who have the Holy Spirit's gift of the new birth that the day will come when we shall join Nicodemus around the throne of God in eternal joy.

Amen

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.