



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

The Holy Trinity

May 27, 2018

Nicodemus: Spiritual Seeker

John 3:1-17

The Holy Trinity...three in one, One in three...In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Let us be...Amen.

There are, the Barna Group reported this past week, 50 million Americans are spiritual seekers looking for genuine community. Here are some stats:

1. 62% are millennials (born 1980-96);
2. 83% use social media every day; 9 out of 10 use Facebook on a weekly basis;
3. Three top places they spend free time: restaurants/coffee houses (65%), parks (49%), and movie theaters (45%).

Nicodemus was a spiritual seeker. There were no surveys in those times, but it has been estimated that there were 6000 of them. (Josephus) They were meticulous adherents to the Torah and to be one was to be "righteous." Like Nicodemus whose name actually means "people's victory."

He came seeking Jesus. Call it the "Nicodemus Factor," he was curious. Something was happening in Jerusalem this Passover. Jesus had cleansed the temple and His signs were drawing crowd. Words were "many believed in his name."

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus wanted some answers along the way. It was the nature of spiritual leaders to meet at night for long discussions. Not so much out of fear, in this case, but for time to get at the truth. Do not miss the movement from dark to light; newness dawning for him.

He came with a seed of faith/trust---"Rabbi...WE know, teacher from God...no other ways your signs could be so compelling." The fertile ground is set!

Jesus' response is a deep plunge into a new truth. To be with God, in Christ means being "born from above."

Time out! My Baptist roots would rather read "born again," but that is not how the Greek is translated---literally, "Begotten of God" since all birthing was thought to be from the Creator.

Nicodemus is engaged, seed of trust, time to talk---"How in the world can a human being be born at all when one is already old? Back into the womb a second time? Please!"

Jesus' response fits both the old and the new way: "One must receive birth UP out of water and Spirit. Water cleanses, Spirit renews...birth as if for the very first time and that sounds like Holy Baptism.

It draws a second important question from this seeker (Seekers ask questions☺)---"How can this be?" And Jesus makes clear that His authority, His presence is powerful ("AMEN. AMEN. UNLESS.") In Jesus, heaven and earth meet on the sure foundation of LOVE, the love of God for all. And His call is for urgency is getting into the new narrative of salvation.

Jesus advances with a story about Moses. Nicodemus would get that! Numbers 21. Torah text about how the people of promise rebelled against the LORD, sent snakes, death followed in judgment. Then, a penitent people returned to the LORD and as Moses saving hoisted serpent was lifted up---healing happened.

In the same way, Jesus' single greatest act in the Gospel will be his decision to be hoisted unto a Cross. Lifted up for the sake of the world that God so loved! The condition of reception is simply trusting or as Luther once said, "Believe and the Spirit is yours!"

The Gospel in a nutshell: "For God so loved the *world* that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. 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."

The word "WORLD" appears three times. As if to ensure the seeker, any seeker, that this One, this Jesus, is the only ONE who seals the promise of salvation, forgiveness, life and love forever! A seeker's seeking ends at the Cross and life begins anew forever in the power of the Holy Spirit through the new community, the disciples fellowship we call the "Holy Spirit Team" we are "Saint Andrew's Lutheran Church."

Nicodemus was one seeker who represents all; we are each one person in Christ, to be an inviting community. So we ask "What do people seek?" It is different than the "good old days" when people just showed up because going to church was good, expected, nothing much else to do on Sundays.

The Barna Report again---(Why the work of the Barna Group? Because like the Pew Trust they are considered deeper and clearer in the trends around religious belief. Pastors I know talk about it often, especially in the Pacific Northwest.)

What do people seek? Spiritual seeking folk look for---

- a. Welcoming (32%). Knowing that they are welcome into the community. Ever been to a church where not one person says "HI?" I have...and likely would never go back!
- b. Friendship (29%). Fellowship in which nurturing relationships are found in small groups. (Take the Voice and notice the number of friendship circles!) /Altar Guild
- c. Support (28%) in life cycles and circumstances. Where people not only offer "thoughts and prayer" but action and enfolding where those who name Jesus walk beside with each other.
- d. Getting to Know God more (27%) and learning that becoming discipleFit comes through
e) preaching and teaching, and f) serving and volunteering to be the servant of the Servant Christ in the world.

Each of us is in some way a seeker after a way, that is truth, and leads us on in life. It our confident belief that, like Nicodemus, we have been met with the Christ community just as we are and invited into the adventure of walking together in good times, bad times, in between times, and all of time that God gives us to be in mission.

Nicodemus must been "born again from on high," this Teacher of Israel, a high affirmation from Jesus as they began to talk together.

He gave testimony to Jesus in John 7. Jesus is brought before the chief priest and Pharisees. His teachings are becoming a problem. He is calling people to believe in him. He is being called a prophet and Nicodemus witnesses about him saying, "Let us hear him out that we might know what he teaches." And Jesus is freed to speak and to go for the time being.

It is our calling to live our lives in Christ and to witness and to invites others into our life together. I believe that the best way to grow a congregation is to give an Invitation. And that begins with finding the place where you serve and to share a story.

Here are three keys places to begin: 1) The Sunday bulletin, 2) Trendings, and 3) The Voice. Find the Points of Entry.

Imagine you are an older person new to the community (You judge what that might mean for you!) Where would you find a way in? Or, a new family next door to you. Where would you invite them in? Or, a person experiencing a tough prognosis or a recent time of grief? Or, a single person new to the Puget Sound?

Seekers seek Points of Entry which meet them at the deepest places where they seek to grow in their lives, in a place where they are cared for and loved.

Each of us is called to be about the work of "telling and living the old old story of Jesus and His love." Our narrative begins in this place, radiates out into the communities we live in, and into the world we share.

We know Nicodemus, disciple of Jesus, light bearer of the Gospel. Jesus stuck to him and he stuck to Jesus. John 19 includes a moment in time: Jesus has been crucified. None of the 12 showed up... Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, asks Pilate for the body.

Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, nearly 100 pounds, took the body, bound it in linen cloths with spices; a garden, a new tomb, they laid Jesus there. Laid...Jesus...there! In the light, an act of love from those born from above! Disciples love to the end!

I am a seeker, you are a seeker, we are all looking for something amidst these times. Change and the 24 hour news cycle leave many seeking a place of safety, serenity, where hope is stoked, joy is found, peace restored among friends of Jesus enfolded into a community which is seeker sensitive because at some point we have all been found.

Let us be courageous in calling like Isaiah. Bearing witness as the adopted sons and daughters of God in Jesus. Powered to be by the Holy Spirit the wind of God who helps us to remember that we are sealed and kept...BOUND AS ONE IN THE STRONG NAME OF TRINITY.

*"Let voices rise and in-ter-weaved, by love and hope set free,
to shape in song this joy, this life: the dance of Trinity."*