

Second Sunday in Lent ~ March 12, 2017  
Sermon preached by the Kurt Aschermann  
Readings: Genesis 12:1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4: 1-5, 13-17, John 3:1-17

In today's gospel, we meet the very interesting character Nicodemus. We will meet Nicodemus two more times in the Gospel of John, which is the only Gospel he appears in: once when he reminds those that wish to condemn Jesus that he deserves at least a tribunal, and later when he joins Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body for burial.

We are reminded that the main purpose of the Gospel of John, unlike the three synoptic gospels, was to establish Jesus as the Messiah the chosen one, the one who was to come. Written by John, 'the favored one', the disciple whose head rests on the shoulder of Jesus in artwork of the Last Supper, and who was eventually exiled to Patmos where he wrote the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation also establishes the messianic purpose of Jesus Christ in the second coming, more on that someday in another homily. Suffice it to say that John wrote his gospel to once and for all establish that Jesus was the Son of God.

Back to our friend Nicodemus, he was a Pharisees and that is an important detail. I fear we have made the Pharisees and their counterparts, the Sadducees, the bad guys over the centuries, the people who condemned and had Jesus crucified. But they were just the leadership of the Hebrew people and made up most of the seventy or so seats of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court which attempted to keep the Jews in line on behalf of the Roman Empire. The Pharisees and Sadducees were not bad people, they were the religious elite, no different really than the religious elite or leadership we have in the church today.

Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, would have come from the middle class of Jewish life. The Sadducees were from the upper classes, the richer and made up most of the priests who were part of the Sanhedrin. This background information is important because our friend Nicodemus would most definitely have been seeking a Messiah, that was the sole purpose of Jewish life at the time, waiting for the deliverer, the one who was to come. Nicodemus would have also understood that Jesus was stirring something up among the people, and that there was a legitimacy about Jesus that other, so-called fake messiahs, didn't have.

Nicodemus would also have known that God, since the beginning, had selected certain people to deliver certain messages for the transformation of God's people. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born 'again' or born from 'above', he was saying that God was again delivering a message to the people. This time the message was the consummation of God's relationship with the people through the birth, life, and death of Christ.

Jesus said to Nicodemus what the Prophet Jeremiah had said before him, 'circumcise your heart', in other words, a new time has come from God and that Nicodemus had to embrace it; that new time was through Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus to be 'born again' in thought and heart, but also in lifestyle, because the new way was through Jesus. Nicodemus was being challenged to leave behind the old way of dominance, power, and control. The new way through Jesus would manifest itself in what our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has coined the Jesus Movement. In short Jesus knows that this Pharisee was getting it and so he wanted Nicodemus to get on board.

Friends, I believe Jesus is doing the same thing with us day in and day out. I believe Jesus calls us to be born again over and over, to get on board to the new way, the Jesus Way, and to join the Jesus Movement. He is telling us that our way is one of love, and inclusion - not exclusion. His way is described best in Matthew 25: serving, feeding, clothing, and visiting others; especially the poor. We too must be born again, not born again in the personal, somewhat selfish way of declaring that our belief system takes care of us by "getting us into heaven". Rather be born again in our commitment and dedication to the Jesus Way of love. Let us be Nicodemus' in our life. Let us search constantly and diligently for the Messiah, the Chosen One, the one who 'is to come.' And when we do that we might just find that he's already here. He's in the face of a child, the suffering mother, the damaged earth that we live on, he is in the face of even the politician who we may feel is wrong, off base, yet also still a child of God.

I invite you to be born again during this Lent and in all times. For it is in this action, this turning to Jesus that we join Nicodemus as part of the Jesus Movement of Love.