**Trinity Sunday/Memorial Day “Nicodemus, the Spirit, and Me” May 26, 2024**

**John 3:1-17; Romans 8:12-17 Rev. Dr. Kate Winters**

The birds were a symphony of sound when I settled down at my writing window on Wednesday morning to prepare this message. The percussion section was especially strong as the back woods rocked with a number of various woodpeckers. I don’t remember the source of the story that said that it was humans beings who were originally given the task of singing the world awake every morning, but when they lost paradise, it was the birds who took over this most important job. It is a glorious one, and I wonder how different life would be if we all met the world at dawn singing.

Our gospel reading doesn’t take place at dawn, but in the night where one human being is engaging in a common human task – trying to figure himself out. I see myself in Nicodemus and have become immediately fixated on the question he asks Jesus: “How can anyone be born again after having grown old?” Preaching about him in earlier years I have always felt for this man, a well-respected leader in his community who has dedicated himself to TORAH, the teaching of the Law. And now that his years are numbered, he has become drawn to this new teacher, and wonders if it is too late for change and the if rest of his life was for naught. Has he been on a wrong path all along? Did he use his one precious life (as Mary Oliver would describe it) in the way he was meant to? Just coming to Jesus, we know he is risking his position and reputation among his people in a last ditch effort to find out.

Now, on this day I do more than **feel** for Nicodemus. He is asking **my question**. “How can one be born again after having grown old?” Retired for over a year now with health issues compiling, my whole way of engaging with the world seems to be changing. Just last Sunday Joel and I attended the installation of the Rev. Kiah Baxter who is the new pastor/teacher of faith formation at the Bar Harbor UCC Church. It was a beautiful service, full of youthful energy, love, and joy! In past years, I would have entered the service with my whole heart, and made sure to connect with Kiah and learn what I could about her and how she does her work, hoping for some collaboration. But last week, I felt I was watching from a distance, knowing I did not pastor my own congregation nor did I the energy with with to engage in that way. I felt bereft on the drive home thinking of other Pentecost Sundays with many lively, joyful celebrations of Spirit in which flames appeared and the rafters just about shook in our churches! And now, here I am with Nicodemus whispering in my ear “How can one be born again after having grown old?” He and I seem to be in the same boat, or at least the same era.

But this message is **not** about true confessions. It is about where Jesus leads Nicodemus after he asks his almost despairing question. Jesus tells him “What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is Spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above! 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!” Now in times past, I would immediately point out that the word “**flesh**” in the gospel of John is not referring so much to our bodies, our human flesh, as it is to the things of “this world” as opposed to the things of “heaven.” But this time, it is helpful to think of our human flesh as belonging to this world. Because it reminds us that our aging minds and bodies are **not all of who we are**. We are also born of the Spirit, the surprising, untamed, ever-moving Spirit, the wind that blows where it chooses!

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, also speaks today of Spirit. In living by the Spirit, he tells us, we are ever children of God. “It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” So, if Nicodemus is at all worried that he has taken a wrong path in his earthly life, if he is born from above, born of the Spirit, he is just beginning. His life in the Spirit can start anew. He is a child again, a child of God. And this doesn’t involve a physical birth, but a spiritual one. And it is true for all of us. It is never too late to start anew.

On this Trinity Sunday it is appropriate, I think, to shine a light on the Spirit, historically the most ignored aspect of the Trinity. We constantly **praise** the **Creator**. You cannot take a walk in these spring days without knowing the delight that **is praise** of the One who created all. We **follow** the Christ Jesus. He is so many things to and for us – teacher, prophet, model, and friend. We know from the time we learn our very first hymn in Sunday School that **Jesus loves us!** And how easy it is to love him back. Now the Spirit…we call on the Spirit, we may sense the Spirit, but how do we have an intimate relationship with Spirit? She is so unpredictable. Here one minute, gone the next. Coming in on a refreshing Spring breeze or a roaring tornado. Symbolized by a tiny flame or a roaring inferno.

I’ll let you in on a secret. I’ve been watching the series about the life of Jesus and his followers called “The Chosen.” It is both streamed and in movie theaters, and it is really **wonderful**. As someone who never liked “Jesus movies” that is really saying a lot. It does portray the character of Nicodemus so I can’t talk about him without seeing that actor’s face. I just love him and his story is so beautifully portrayed. That face and portrayal has allowed me to enter into a **deeper relationship** with Nicodemus. As I said at the beginning, I see myself in him.

Now, think about it, with the Creator – we can see the face of all creation and know it is of God. With Jesus, we can choose our favored portrait, black, red, white, brown, always with compassionate eyes, and also see the face of God. With the Spirit – do you see a face? An image with which to connect and relate to the face of God?

As I get older, I think I am beginning to develop one. And it’s **not** what I expected. The Spirit for me is a **child**, a child with a face of whimsy and wonder. She takes my hand and leads me to all the places I have forgotten how to get to. She is full of questions, just as I was when I was little. She tells me I need a dog and has me watching hummingbirds and blowing on dandelion seeds. She takes naps when she wants to and dances up a storm when things get a bit too quiet. She sits on my lap as I meditate and synchronizes her breath to mine. She accompanies me in this new stage of my life and fills it with mystery and hope. She promises she is going to take me swimming this summer in a flood of God’s love. I haven’t been swimming for decades. But I believe her.

I like to imagine Nicodemus with his own spirit child as he dances further into the mystery along with me. After all, we are all **children of God**, born of the Spirit, just beginning to learn her steps. Amen.

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