

Accept!

3.12.17

As baptized believers we vow to **accept** the freedom and power God gives us to **resist evil, injustice, and oppression** in whatever forms they present themselves? In other words, we accept the fact that we CANNOT make it on our own.

For the next few weeks, during the season of Lent, we will explore what it means to make a commitment to join in the work of Christ in the world through our baptism into the community of faith. We will be taking a look at our baptismal vows. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Last week, we began with the first of our baptismal vows:

To Renounce the Spiritual forces of wickedness, **Reject** the evil powers of this world, And **Repent** of our sin.

We were reminded that, though there are spiritual forces of wickedness and evil powers at work in this world, there is hope for our future. For the power of God is stronger than the power of Satan. The power of good triumphs over the power of evil, and the power of life—of resurrection—defeats the power of death. (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

In our scripture reading the morning, we meet someone who doesn't seem like he's in *"need of a Savior. He is not in pain. He is not disappointed or angry. He does not appear to be suffering. In fact, it is the opposite. By all measurements of his world, he is a success story. He has made it. He has achieved the Jewish Dream. He is a Pharisee, a member of the ruling class, and a leader among the Sanhedrin."* (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries).

Nicodemus - A pharisee, teacher of Israel, and a ruler of the Jews. (Harper's Bible Dictionary, Paul J. Achtemeier, General Editor, © 1985, The Society of Biblical Literature, Harper Collins Publishers, NY. Nicodemus, p. 704)

"And yet, in spite of his success, Nicodemus is clearly not satisfied with what his life has become. He comes to Jesus seeking something that all the worldly success in the world can't give him. He seems genuinely drawn to Jesus,... because he yearns for something deeper and more meaningful in his life than what the world has to offer." (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

He came by night. *"Was he ashamed or fearful to be seen with Jesus by day? Or were there too many people clamoring for Jesus' attention by day?"* Or was this simply a chance to have *"an honest, uninterrupted conversation"* with Jesus?

Roger Fredrikson suggests that the reason Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, was because that's where Nicodemus was *"living... in darkness."* Although Nicodemus believed that *"God was with Jesus, he is ignorant."* (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 "An Encounter and an Affirmation"; pp. 78 - 91)

Chesser puts it this way:

The fact *"that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night... would suggest that Nicodemus doesn't really want his friends and colleagues to know that he is interested in Jesus. He doesn't want to risk being publicly associated with the teachings of Jesus or the growing movement Jesus is inspiring. He wants to keep his curiosity about and his admiration for Jesus a secret from those in his circle, at least in this first encounter. In this way, he not*

only protects his status as a person of privilege, but also maintains the illusion that he is loyal to the values of the world.” (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

Why did Nicodemus visit Jesus?

Apparently, because of all that had transpired, Nicodemus wanted to talk with Jesus. He recognized that *“no one can do these things unless God is with him.”* (John 3.2) According to the Gospel writer, Jesus had attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee where He changed the water into wine, then cleared out the Temple of the market place it had become. (Communicator’s Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation”; pp. 78 - 91)

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him.”

“He came to Jesus in humility. Calling Him ‘Rabbi’ was a sign of respect. It meant he “could learn something from Him.” Communicator’s Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation” (pp. 78 - 91)

Nicodemus seems to be speaking on behalf of others who share similar concerns or questions. Maybe there were some members of the Council that wondered: *“By What authority was Jesus doing these things? What was His purpose? Did He have a new truth to reveal?”* Apparently, others from the council thought highly of what Jesus was doing, and were just curious.

Communicator’s Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation” (pp. 78 - 91)

When Nicodemus inquired of Jesus how He did what He did, Jesus responded in a somewhat cryptic manner. He said: *“Unless you are born anew/born from above/born again... you cannot see the kingdom of God.”* (v.3)

Born Again?

“How in the world can someone enter their mother’s womb a second time?”

Jesus is not talking about a second physical birth. Not a literal being born again. Jesus instead is talking about a *“new beginning, starting over again.”* *“New life”* given by God. God’s grace breaking in a *“new creation.”*

This is a spiritual birth. It is *“a spiritual act of divine grace in which God gives Himself to someone, who then receives/accepts Him and is born anew.”* *“it is in the union of the divine and the human, supernatural and natural, heavenly and earthly, that new life comes.”*

This new phrase was *“... fresh (and) alive with meaning. Another chance. Starting over. New life!”* a fresh start is possible!

“The newborn person understands a new order of being, the kingdom of God.” They receive *“new eyes and a new heart”* and becomes part of *“a new family, a child of God living in joyful obedience to God.”*

Nicodemus didn’t understand this, even though he was a very learned teacher. (Communicator’s Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation”; pp. 78 - 91)

“...unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom.” (v.5)

the new birth... being born of water and the spirit...suggests a *“plunging under, a cleansing”*... symbolic of *“humiliation and helplessness of repentance.”*

As well as, God giving *“His life-changing Spirit...”*

Being born of water and the Spirit, we become kingdom people. But it is not for ourselves alone. We are joining a new family. God's family.

It is like *“becoming citizens of a new country joining a new people and swearing allegiance to a new flag. We enter a new land.”* (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation” (pp. 78 - 91)

You must be born again. Anew. (v. 7)-

The new birth is a gift from God, an act of grace. (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation” (pp. 78 - 91)

Jesus refers to an OT story involving Moses and the children of Israel. *“Near the end of wandering in the wilderness, and shortly before they entered the promised land, the children of Israel once again murmured and complained. So the Lord sent fiery serpents that brought disease and death. Some of the people repented. And Moses interceded on their behalf. He cried out to God. And the Lord offered salvation in a strange way. He commanded Moses to make a fiery serpent of bronze and hang it on a pole. And when the people were bitten they could be healed by lifting their eyes and looking at the serpent. They were saved by an act of faith.”* (Numbers 21.4-9)

Jesus said, that, in the same way, the Son of Man came *“to be lifted up on a pole.”* His *“amazing and costly sacrifice asks for a response of faith. Whoever sees and believes/accepts Jesus will be given eternal life.”* (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation” (pp. 78 - 91)

16 *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. 17 God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”*

The *“lifting up of the Son of Man is an act of love... which is the very nature of God, reaching out to all who are unlovely and sick, like the dying Israelites, like Nicodemus, like us. That love is not selective or discriminating. It is universal, with no limitations. God comes to the whole world in love.”* (Communicator's Commentary, John, © 1985 Word, Inc; Roger Fredrikson, NT Vol 4; ch. 4 “An Encounter and an Affirmation” (pp. 78 - 91)

God's Invitation is for all.

What happened to Nicodemus?

After the evening visit, Nicodemus fades from the picture, and the reader is left wondering *“What happened to Nick?”*

He reappears in John 7. 50-52. Where he showed more courage in protesting against the condemnation of Christ without giving Him a hearing.

Later on (John 19.40), Nicodemus brings a lavish gift of spices to anoint Jesus' Body for Burial. (New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition, © 1962, The Inter-Varsity Fellowship; Inter-Varsity Press, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, Wheaton, IL, Editor, JD Douglas; Nicodemus, p. 834)

“The character of Nicodemus appears only in the Gospel of John, where he is mentioned on three occasions: this passage from the third chapter, where he comes to Jesus under the cover of night seeking information on who exactly Jesus is and where Jesus gets his miraculous power; a few chapters later, when he advises his colleagues among ‘the chief priests and the Pharisees’ to hear and investigate the situation more thoroughly

before making a judgment concerning Jesus; and toward the end of John's gospel, when he brings a personal donation of one hundred pounds of aloes and myrrh to be used to anoint Jesus for burial after the crucifixion. It is made clear by all of these actions that Nicodemus is a man of both power and means. He is, by today's standards, a prominent member of the educated upper class elite, a Jewish man who achieved worldly success in spite of the fact that he's an outsider in the Roman world." (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

"Eventually, Nicodemus comes around to letting others know he seeks the light that Jesus offers more than he wants to maintain his privileged status. He makes a public confession of his faith by his actions. By the end of the third encounter, it is clear that Nicodemus has come to believe Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. But it takes him a long time to go public with his true feelings. It takes a long time before he is able to be born again, ... into God's dream." (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

As baptized believers, part of our call is to bring healing and reconciliation to the brokenness in our communities and world.

"What Jesus offered Nicodemus was something much greater than anything the world could give him. It is something much greater than anything the world can give us." (Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

When we believe the Truth, we live the Truth. We become new creatures. WE choose to live in the Light.

"It is one thing to say that we are Christians, but it is another thing entirely to live as disciples of Jesus Christ."

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

*But then what? What changes in our lives, in our hearts, in our souls? How do our lives testify that we been born again by the Spirit of Christ? How has baptism into this new life, this being birthed into a whole other kind of world, claimed us? "Just like Nicodemus, we desperately need to be born again.." "Living into our vow to **accept** the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves .. takes a lifetime of commitment, and study, and practice, and constant new beginnings."*
(Dr. Dawn Chesser, Discipleship Ministries)

ACCEPT the Freedom and Power God gives us. And Live Holy Lives.