

LENT 2

YEAR A

GENESIS 12:1-4a

ROMANS 4:1-5, 13-17

JOHN 3:1-17

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Many that have not read the Bible wonder where to start. I have been asked about where to begin reading the Bible. There are so many books of the Bible and some are confusing without a good foundation of faith. Even when long time Christians read the Bible they struggle to understand. Jesus does not scold anyone for not understanding but he wants us all to come to a closer relationship with God. That relationship is nurtured as we come together for worship services and as we read the Bible. Where do new Christians begin to read so they will have a good understanding of who God is? I usually ask them to begin with John's gospel. John's gospel reveals God in a way that the other books of the Bible do not. All of the Bible is important or us to read and understand but John is a good beginning place.

John 3:1, 2 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."

Nicodemus was one looking for a better understanding of Jesus and of his relationship with God. Although Nicodemus was a Pharisee he was searching for a closer relationship with God. He wanted to know the truth about Jesus. Nicodemus heard the teachings of Jesus just as the other Pharisees heard Jesus. The others were often hostile toward Jesus. They were looking for ways to destroy Jesus and his credibility. They were not looking to have a better understanding of Jesus but Nicodemus was looking for the truth. Nicodemus knew that Jesus was different from the others that were teaching. His message and his authority were not like the ordinary scribe or rabbi. People were stirred up and they were listening to

the teachings of Jesus. Nicodemus wanted to know more. He went to Jesus at night and Jesus entered into conversation with him.

The Lord invites each of us to come and learn. We are invited to learn the ways of the Lord and to enter into relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We come from many different ways of life and from many places but Jesus does not turn us away. He talks to us sharing fellowship with us. Jesus invites us to come to the table with him so that we might be fed.

John 3:3 Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Nicodemus knows that people cannot do what Jesus is doing without the presence of God. They cannot heal people apart from God and they cannot teach this way unless God is with them and they are abiding in God’s truth. Because he is a leader of the Jews Nicodemus knows about people being blessed by God but he has great difficulty with the spiritual issue of being born from above. Some translations say we must be born again or born anew. The Greek words can mean either born again or born from above. Nicodemus heard Jesus say he must be born again and he had a difficult time getting his mind around it. This thought of being born from above or born again was confusing to Nicodemus. He thinks of literally going back into his mother’s womb and experiencing physical birth a second time. Jesus is talking about spiritually being born from above.

Many of us also have questions about being born from above or being born again. There are many that hear the words “born again” and feel threatened because it has become a teaching that excludes rather than includes. Many have taught that being born again is something I or we must do. I must find a way to get right with God and we call it being born again. As I read about Jesus and study his words and see his life, I know there is nothing about Jesus that would exclude any that want a

relationship with God. When Jesus speaks of being born from above he is speaking of something that God is doing. God is being born in us. It is God's action and God's grace that would invite me into this relationship with God.

Two of my granddaughters were adopted from south Korea. Anna and Sarah were born there and came here in the early months of their lives. My grandson, Ryan, was born in Cedar Rapids but was also adopted by my daughter and her husband. They were adopted and given new names as they became part of the family. We might not think of this as a rebirth or being born again but they did become part of a new family. Jeremiah and Averie were born into the family. Their birth placed them into the family which includes all that we are. Each became involved in the relationships within the family. Each relationship within the family is unique. Each person in the family has a place. Each of us fits into our families in a certain way or certain place. We belong to the family but each of us has a special place.

John 3:8 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.”

What does it mean to be born from above? It is being born into the kingdom of God. It means you have embraced the gift of knowledge and the gift of relationship with God. Being born from above means being born of the Holy Spirit and born into the life of Jesus Christ. Some think of our service of baptism but being born from above is more than our tradition of baptizing children and adults. It is more than pouring some water and saying some words. Being born from above is allowing the Holy Spirit to guide your life so that you enter into a lasting relationship with Jesus Christ. It is about receiving the life of the one that gives you everything you need and then eternal life. Our relationship with God grows when we

allow ourselves to be born from above. It grows stronger when we allow the Holy Spirit or the holy wind from God to blow through us.

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may 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.

This spiritual relationship with the Lord begins with the Son of Man being lifted up to the cross. It is God’s act of love in Jesus Christ that gives us this new life. God loved you so much that God gave Jesus on the cross that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. The Lord did everything required for our salvation. By grace we have been saved. If you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ then you believe these words. If you believe these words and act on then you are born from above. You have been born from above and you are walking with the Holy Spirit. You have life and you have every blessing from God. It is not the purpose of our Lord Jesus to pursue your judgment or your punishment but to give you life. Jesus did not come to condemn you but to save you.

Entrust your life to the Lord Jesus. Let the Lord change your life. You must be born from above. The Lord went to the cross for you. You are drawn to him because of that cross. On the cross he provided for your salvation. Come to him and receive your life. AMEN