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John 3: 1 - 17

## **BORN OF WORD AND SPIRIT**

Today believers around the globe are celebrating the unique triune character of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We celebrate and in the midst of our celebration, if we are honest, we stumble as if we have not completely learned the steps of the dance. We trip over what we believe about God—existing in three distinct expressions of a singular one. Yes, we celebrate what we know is true, but we stumble because the mere words always fail to capture the true essence of the trinity.

When we discuss it or write about it—when we even refer to our triune God—we are always left with a sense that there is more there than we can fully express. The contrast between what we know to be true, and what can be expressed even partially, is truly astonishing.

We have been ushered to our seats in this grand theater of God's kingdom by a leader of the Jews—a Pharisee named Nicodemus, and he is our enigma, isn't he? Such an enigmatic figure who comes forward to Jesus either under the cloak of darkness to preserve his reputation (in other words, a coward) or someone who is boldly seeking the light in the midst of darkness—the light of Christ—or maybe a mixture of the two, even as we are a mixture of the two.

Jesus wants Nicodemus to experience the temporal and the spatial relationship that God makes possible for all of us. So when the imagery of a second chance, or rebirth, or being born from above doesn't work, Jesus goes on to say, "You must be born of water and spirit." So the water becomes that visible, tangible symbol that you have to be present with, in order for that relationship to be healthy and whole.

Any who have ever tried to maintain a long-distance relationship knows how difficult it is to stay close when you are physically apart. I think it took me about six months to be away from my girlfriend before I went back to ask her to marry me—six months that couldn't last a minute longer, I decided. I drove all night from Baton Rouge to the plains of Alabama, because being apart just wasn't working.

You have to be present with one another if you want to be whole in your relationship.

The second part that Jesus says is so important is spiritual birth—the spatial aspect of our existence, an existence that's beyond us and yet in us. Something that we can't conjure up and yet must in essence be a part of ourselves—the existence which prompts us to give ourselves wholly to another and to God.

The body of Christ, the church, is like the person represented in Nicodemus. It must be

born both of a temporal relationship and it must be born of a reality that is in essence the trinity: something we can never fully comprehend.

This renewing the vision experience—this capital campaign we are sharing—is both physical and spiritual. It's temporal and spatial. It's about a physical building because we want to experience the spiritual renewal that comes from being with one another and with those we have not even met ... a passion which causes us to want to physically be together.

Are you beginning to feel a little bit like Nicodemus? How can this be? A spiritual passion that leads us to a physical reality leads us back to the essence of what it means to trust in what we cannot understand?

Why do we love each other so much? It is because of the love of Christ.

A very wise person has noticed that this building plan is not about a building at all, it's about what goes on inside that building. And I propose to you that the building is as much about the way that we relate to one another during this process as it is about the building that will be the end result.

How will we relate to another? We must be born anew from above: a tangible and a spiritual connection. Now do you begin to understand how Nicodemus felt? How could all this be? The temporal and the spatial coming together in our world: the creator, and the redeemer, and the sustainer.

How appropriate that today, Trinity Sunday, is a day to commit to a building program. How appropriate is what we did not, and some still do not, believe could ever be possible for twenty-six households out of well over 200 households. Twenty-six households have made a temporal and spatial statement. Twenty-six households have already pledged over \$472,000 for the next three years.

And all they ask is that the other ninety percent of us be inspired. Give God the glory. Will we follow their faith into God's kingdom, which exists in part as Bush Hill Presbyterian Church, but which really exists far beyond us and we know that? The term "Kingdom of God" only occurs twice in the Gospel of John and both of them are found in our passage today. Kingdom, which causes us to want to share our oneness with Christ with one another. Kingdom, where every spiritual desire can be evidenced by the struggle taking place within—the trials of claiming God's vision of a new renewed facility here and all of the mixed feelings that are shared and some that are not.

Simply put, Jesus offered Nicodemus renewal that comes from God. And it comes now in this life. Simply put, Jesus is offering us renewal of all our ministries, all our visions, and comes now in this life. Can there be a better example on Commitment Sunday than Nicodemus asking "How?"? For we know that later, he did believe. Amen.