

March 16 2014

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 121

Genesis 12:1-4

John 3:1-17

Sermon *Born of Water and the Spirit*

Now I remember very, very little about my high school geometry class. By the way, how many of you do remember a lot about your high school geometry class? OK I will take your word for that. The reason I don't is obviously because math was not my forte but one thing I do remember, is the shortest distance between two points for the most part is a straight line. I found this to be true in walking and driving as well. For example, did you ever walk or ride with somebody who always knows a short cut? I know those short cuts, too. There are always those who seek to make simple things like directions much more complicated than they really are and I have quite often found the short cut ends up taking longer sometimes than a long cut could any day of the week.

One of the reasons the editors of our Bible reading lectionaries for this morning choose John 3:16 and 17 for the conclusion of today's Gospel passage is because it summarizes in a simple way in two verses the entire Gospel passage for today. In fact Martin Luther called these two simple verses the Gospel in miniature. The whole Gospel in miniature because they simplify something which for many of us we try to make a lot more complex than it really is and in so doing we burden ourselves and burden others in the process; that is how to be in relationship with God and the verses simplify this message in this way by telling us, we as Christian men and women in relationship with God is like simply opening our hands and receiving a gift; a gift of love that God has for us in the life and in teachings of Jesus. John portrays Nicodemus here in this passage as a sincere searcher after truth but in his journey after truth Nicodemus wants to take one of those short cuts that I spoke about before by complicating this very simple message that Jesus presents in this passage. And he does these three different ways.

And the odd thing about it is, if I try to take that short cut, Nicodemus ends up taking the long way around like many of us as drivers and walkers in this world. First like many Christians Nicodemus tries to draw the conclusion that God's love for us must be demonstrated by some sort of miraculous sign like an earth quake or a bolt of lightning or the sound of thunder. He says these words in the passage. "Rabbi we know you are a teacher come from God for nobody can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." In spite of Nicodemus' statement, all through the Gospel, Jesus never lets the sensational, the flashing get in the way of that

simple message that we shared in this passage. In fact many times we found in reading the Gospels together that Jesus downplays the miracles and tells others to keep them a secret. Instead saying, to be born again means receiving God's care for us and allowing God's Holy Spirit to fill us and to help us turn our lives around in a positive direction. While Nicodemus is never really satisfied with Jesus' answer and he tries to complicate matters in a second way of pressing Jesus into admitting that there has to be something more that a person must do to receive God's love. After Jesus speaks about being born again Nicodemus asks this question. "How in the world can a person be born when a person is old like me? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born". And Jesus says, "Truly I say to you unless one is born of water and spirit you cannot enter the kingdom of God." Jesus again reassured Nicodemus that the things that we do to respond to God's love are extremely important. Extremely important but being born of water and spirit is living life in the awareness of God's goodness, God's love and embracing the meaning of our baptism and allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us is exactly what it takes to come into a relationship with God. At this point Nicodemus is completely confused, befuddled, and puzzled. And he says, "How can this be?" It just seems too simple.

A third time he can't figure it out what is going on Jesus, you can tell by this passage that, is getting a little bit frustrated and a little bit impatient with Nicodemus' attitude but nevertheless he refers to the incident with Moses and a strange sort of bronze-serpent on top of a pole in the wilderness experiences of the children of Israel in Number chapter 21. Jesus said as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. In so doing he likens the crucifixion in this strange time when the children of Israel were being bitten by poisonous snakes in the wilderness and reminds Nicodemus if we can but trust enough to look up and to keep our eyes on Jesus when we are being bitten by life in every way; we too will live. We too will have life. You know we never do find out until much later in the Gospels whether any of this makes sense to Nicodemus or not but he does if you remember toward the end of the Gospels appears in a very positive light as a follower of Jesus.

Unfortunately at this point in this story Nicodemus confuses the simplicity of God's love for us with the complexity involved that is sometimes in leading the Christian life after we have had a chance to embrace the love that God has for us in Jesus. Living the Christian life is a confirmation and church membership and walking the journey of faith day by day is all about.

Before this can take place we must first allow the Holy Spirit it comes into our hearts and change the way we see life and way we live life day by day. First of all we have to believe God's care for us is real and finally we must be born again

by allowing the Holy Spirit of God, room to work within our lives day by day. I am going to encourage you right now to take a few moments of quiet and to give God that chance. To give God that chance to work in your hearts today as well. Let bow our heads.