

Trinity Sunday – May 27, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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John 3:1-17 (NIV)

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2) He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." 3) Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." 4) "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" 5) Jesus answered, "**Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6) Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**" 7) You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8) The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." 9) "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. 10) "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11) Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12) I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13) No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. 14) **Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.**" 16) **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** 17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Dear friends in Christ;

I'm sure you've heard the saying, "curiosity killed the cat." Sometimes we use that saying to stifle or suppress curiosity. A child's repetitive questions of "how" or "why" might just be annoying enough to elicit that response from an adult. Not all curiosity is a bad thing. In fact, we often speak of someone who has an intense desire for knowledge as someone who has a "healthy curiosity."

In some ways, we could say that Nicodemus had a healthy curiosity. He came to Jesus at night when he could have a personal and private conversation with Jesus to seek answers from Jesus. Jesus words had aroused his curiosity. Now Jesus had an opportunity to satisfy Nicodemus curiosity with his teaching about the way to eternal life.

Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God with Nicodemus and explained how it would be possible for him to live in this kingdom. Often we use the word salvation to speak of the fact that we have been rescued and saved from the consequences of sin so that we will be able to live forever in heaven.

Perhaps like Nicodemus, we have a curiosity about spiritual things. In our text, Jesus satisfies our curiosity about salvation by teaching that

Theme: The Triune God Has Provided Your Salvation

1. The Father gave his Son for you (vv. 16-17)
2. The Son died on the cross for you (vv. 10-15)
3. The Holy Spirit gives you life (vv. 1-9)

In the creeds that we use to confess our Christian faith, we confess our belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was talking with Nicodemus he also spoke of the three persons of the Trinity –

first he spoke of the Holy Spirit who gives life, then he spoke of himself – the Son – who died on the cross for you and lastly he spoke of the Father who gave his son for you.

Since we are used to speaking first of the Father, then the Son, and then the Holy Spirit, let's look at this text in a curious sort of way today! Let's study it backwards – beginning with verses 16-17.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17) For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

In these verses, Jesus speaks of his Father's love as he explains the good news of salvation. Verse 16 is sometimes called the Gospel (good news) in a nutshell because it tells us everything we need to know and believe to be saved and have eternal life.

The Father's love for the world and the people in it goes back to eternity – to the beginning of time. This love knows no limits or bounds. He gave so that "everyone" could be saved and have eternal life with him. He gave his Son in keeping with his eternal plan to rescue sinners from sin and its condemnation.

Jesus speaks of our salvation as a gift of the Father – he sent his Son into our world to become one of us, to live under the law for us, to suffer and die an eternal death for us so that because of his perfect life and innocent death we might live forever in the kingdom of God.

In love, God gave the world his Son so that whoever believes in him will live forever. He sent his Son to the world to save the world – to provide salvation for everyone.

Jesus wanted Nicodemus to understand that he was the way, the truth and the life. He was the one the Father sent to provide salvation for all. The Father gave his Son for you and the Son died on the cross for you.

The apostle Paul reminds us that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Jesus expresses his agreement with the Father's plan of salvation by telling Nicodemus that he must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him might have eternal life.

Our curiosity might ask, "How can this be?" Jesus answered that question when he spoke to Nicodemus. He reminded Nicodemus of a well-known event from the history of the nation of Israel. The Lord had miraculously rescued his people from their slavery in Egypt. Unfortunately, the people began to grumble against Moses and the Lord. The Lord sent poisonous snakes to chastise those who were complaining against him. Many people died when they were bitten by these snakes.

The Lord's discipline had its effect. The people confessed that they had sinned. They asked for mercy and forgiveness. So the Lord told Moses to make a snake and put it on a pole and promised that anyone who was bitten could look at it and live. **So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.** (Numbers 11:9)

God often uses visible signs so that people can see the invisible by faith. Jesus explained that this sign, like many other signs in the Old Testament pointed ahead to him and his saving work. Jesus was the son of God who became one a human being. Jesus is speaking of himself when he told Nicodemus that the son of man must be lifted. up like the snake in the wilderness so that whoever believes in him will live. When Jesus was

lifted up on the cross, he provide salvation for all. In John 12:32, Jesus said, **“I when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.” He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.”**

In curiosity, we might wonder; “Did Nicodemus understand all this?” It’s hard to say but we do know that even Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand these things until after Jesus died and rose again. A more important question is, “Do you understand these things?” Do you understand that Jesus died on the cross for you? Do you believe the promise that Jesus made, “that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” Jesus’ words are like a blank check. He’s signed it. He’s filled in the payment amount but left the pay to the order line blank so you can fill in your name!

The Holy Spirit gives us life in the kingdom of God. When Jesus spoke of the work of the Spirit, Nicodemus wondered how the Spirit worked. Like Nicodemus, we might also wonder how – how can the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit all be one God. Jesus directed Nicodemus away from the “how” toward the “what.” In the same we, we don’t have to know how. What is important is that we know and believe what the Triune God has done for us. And that is really where the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit gives us life.

Jesus explained why this is necessary to Nicodemus when he said: **“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6) Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**

No one can enter the kingdom of heaven by themselves because everyone is born sinful and outside of that kingdom. Jesus words are a powerful reminder of the truth that all are sinful from birth, sinful from the time our mothers conceived us. (cf. Psalm 51:5) After reminding us of our need for new life, Jesus explains how that new life is given to us.

Let me ask you a question. Did you do anything to be born into this world? Did you make any kind of contribution to your physical birth? Of course not. Just as we are unable to contribute anything to our physical birth so we are unable to contribute anything to our spiritual birth. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit – to give us new life.

The Holy Spirit grants us spiritual life in baptism. The Spirit of God works in the water of Baptism to grant us new life in the Kingdom of God. Anyone who rejects baptism is rejecting the very life that Jesus won when he gave up his life for sinners. The Spirit’s Word which is in with and under the water of baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe the words and promise of God. May we always treasure our baptism as a faith creating, life giving blessing from God.

Jesus continued his conversation with Nicodemus by saying: **“You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8) The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”**

Jesus was sharing a “new teaching” with Nicodemus – at least it was new to Nicodemus!. All of his life, Nicodemus had been laboring under the false assumption that he could work his way into the kingdom of God and heaven. He is surprised by what Jesus has said. Don’t be surprise when I tell you that you need to be born again, Jesus replied. His words are an encouragement to believe. And then Jesus explains how the Holy Spirit does his work. **The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”** He says the Spirit is like the wind. We

can't see the wind. We don't really know where the wind comes from even though we can feel its effects and hear it blow. Jesus wants us to understand that just as we can experience the effects of the wind, so believers experience the effects of the Spirit's work in their lives. The very fact that a person believes is evidence that the Spirit has been at work in their lives. The Apostle Paul explains Jesus thoughts simply when he writes, **“No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.** (1 Corinthians 12:3 NIV)

Perhaps we've treated this text in a curious manner – looking at it backwards, discussing it from the end to the beginning. But with his words – Jesus has told us all we need to satisfy our curiosity about salvation. Dear friends, you don't have to be surprised by what Jesus has said – you can believe with the faith given to you by the Holy Spirit.

The Triune God Has Provided Your Salvation

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Amen.