

Boldly Make All Things New

John 3:1-17 (May 30, 2021)

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Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He 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.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The 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.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“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. ¹⁷“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.

Historical Context

Nicodemus was a prominent Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the high court in Israel. The Pharisees were a group of Jews who were fastidious in keeping the letter of the Law and often opposed Jesus throughout His ministry. But, Nicodemus showed favor to Jesus and appears three times in John. Nicodemus visits Jesus one night to discuss his teachings with him. Nicodemus is also mentioned when he states the law concerning the arrest of Jesus during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Finally, Nicodemus appears at the Crucifixion, when he provides healing herbs and assists in preparing the body of Jesus for entombment.

Theme: Boldly Make All Things New

What does it mean to be born again? The language has come to suggest some sort of metaphysical transformation, a shift that promises eternal reward. For many being born again is the culmination of the Christian task, but for Jesus this second birth marked a beginning of a dangerous and fraught journey. It entailed leaving behind the safety nets and starting fresh.

The second birth of water recalls Jesus’ own emergence from the waters of the Jordan. It recalls Israel’s own emergence from slavery into liberation through the waters of a parted sea. In short, it recalls moments when people have set out on new and treacherous journeys, called by God to make themselves in a new image, to forge an identity apart from the markers that had shaped them and reimagine their communities and their very bodies as God might.

Jesus is pushing his followers to understand that new life emerges constantly from the old, that God sends new life from above and that new perspectives interrupt our habits. This is what Jesus

names as salvation. God sent Jesus so the world might be saved through him. Through his message of love and the vision he bears. Through the human transformation he facilitates and for the radical departures he encouraged. To be followers of Jesus demands a similar radical departure from norms and a similar willingness to boldly make all things new.