



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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June 3, 2012

Trinity Sunday

Sermon Text: [John 3:1-17](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 150](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 8:14-17](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 3:1-17](#)

Born Into the Trinity's Kingdom

Born in flesh

Born of the Spirit

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever had that experience where someone brings you news or an answer to a question that is so different than what you expected or not what you were hoping to hear and your head just starts spinning and you're not sure you heard it all quite right? A lot of times today those kinds of things happen when you get test results back from a doctor. The doctor says something to you and the news is not what you were hoping to hear. Your head is spinning and you're not really digesting everything else that is being said. There are other times in life I suppose when we get messages like that, but a lot of times it seems they just involve tragedy. Something where it's hard to process everything that's being said, and we really miss a lot. Do you know that feeling I'm talking about? The knot in your stomach? The tightening? Your head spinning and not being able to understand?

I have to wonder if that's what Nicodemus was going through when he went to talk to Jesus on the night that I read to you about. I suppose he went at night so that maybe other people wouldn't see him going to Jesus. He gets there and did you notice he kind of butters Jesus up quite a bit? "Teacher, good teacher, we know you have to be God because no one could do all the things you're doing if they weren't from God." This is a pretty bold statement that he is making.

It's the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He had just done a few miracles. Maybe he is thinking of the water into wine at Caana. Maybe it is some other things that had just taken place. The cleansing of the temple had just taken place. Maybe those are the signs that he is thinking about when he says "You couldn't do these things unless you are from God." But you have to kind of think that he's really smooching Jesus so to speak, right?

Did you notice Jesus' answer to him? He calls him good teacher and Jesus responds by saying "You can't have the kingdom of God unless you are born again." Do you think Nicodemus has a little problem trying to process that answer to what he had said?

It doesn't seem to fit. It doesn't seem to be a response. But Jesus is using this opportunity to teach Nicodemus something that he desperately needs to know. It really almost sounds kind of harsh.

Jesus even sounds a little bit harsh a little bit later when he says "You're a teacher of Israel and you can't understand these things? I'm talking in earthly terms. How are you going to get it when I talk in heavenly terms?" Jesus really sounds like he's a little harsh. I'm not surprised that Nicodemus couldn't understand these things, not because Jesus is harsh but because these are things we just can't understand on our own unless God reveals them to us. We'd like to give ourselves credit and think we're smart enough to figure everything out.

Maybe sometimes we can figure some things out. Have you figured out why there are streamers in the church? Some of you probably just think that looks stupid and wonder why that is there and just carry on with your day, but there's a reason and a purpose. Maybe you can figure it out.

You can't understand the things that come from the Spirit of God unless the Spirit of God lives in you. So to say that you have to be born of water and the Spirit, I don't expect Nicodemus to understand it until the Holy Spirit works faith in Nicodemus' heart. From what we see later in Scripture, I do believe that God worked faith in Nicodemus' heart. He finally did get it.

On our own, by our own sinful nature, we just are not going to figure stuff out because we are sinners. We do what we are. Spiritual truths can only be spiritually understood by the Spirit of God. If you don't have the Spirit of God, since you are born of sinful flesh and you are a sinner, you're not going to understand it.

I had this experience recently at a wedding here at church. I talked at the wedding about how "You look really nice and all this stuff, but you know what? Underneath you're both still filthy rotten sinners, just like I am and just like everyone else here is." Later that night at the reception, I went to get a beer at the bar, and all of a sudden I felt someone standing right at my shoulder. I turned and they said "I've been looking for you all night. I've got a question to ask. I've been stalking you." That's a fine how do you do. I didn't see any weapons, so I said "Go ahead." She said, "How in the world can you say that you're a filthy rotten sinner, that I'm a filthy rotten sinner, that we're all filthy rotten sinners," and she kept going and going and going. We talked for the next 45 minutes. I found out she had no problem with me saying that we're all sinners. She just didn't like the words "filthy" and "rotten."

What other kinds of sins are there? According to our own minds, we'd like to rank sins. We'd like to say "I don't do everything perfect, but I'm not as bad as that guy." Right? That's how we are by nature. That's what our sinful nature wants to do. It wants to rank things and say "Yeah, okay, I'm kind of bad. But I'm not THAT bad." The truth of the matter is flesh gives birth to flesh. We are all spiritually dead, spiritually blind and enemies of God. We have nothing we can offer to God. When you remember that

truth, that you can offer nothing to God that is good in his eyes until God works in you first and gives you the gift of faith, that will help you to understand that phrase at the end of the Athanasian Creed that maybe troubled some of you... that we'll rise from the dead and each will answer for their own personal deeds. Those who have done good will rise to eternal life. Those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. All our lives we have been taught we are saved by faith, not by works. That makes it sound like we're saved by works. But by nature, because sinful flesh gives birth to sinful flesh, the only thing I can do is sin. All my righteous acts are like filthy rags as God says through Isaiah. I can't do anything good in God's eyes. In the Book of Hebrews it says without faith it is impossible to please God. So you can't do anything good unless God comes to you first. Because you are born a sinner and you are a sinner, you can't be born into the Trinity's kingdom unless God comes and does the work.

That's what Jesus is trying to drive into Nicodemus' head. "Quit looking at yourself for your source of confidence. Quit looking at yourself and patting yourself on the back that you figured out that I'm from God." What he really wants him to understand is what he could never understand. He's not just from God, he IS God. That would make no sense to anyone who looked at Jesus unless the Spirit works in your heart first and unless you are born of the Spirit.

Then Jesus kind of goes through with Nicodemus after this, after showing him the need to be born again because he's a sinner, he then goes through and shows how the Trinity really has worked to do the unimaginable. The Trinity has worked to take away our sins. The Father so loved the world that he sent his Son. The Son had to be lifted up and die for our sins and then rise again and then be lifted up when he ascended into heaven. The Spirit is poured out on us so that we are born of the Spirit and can understand that what Jesus did for the world he did for us personally.

When you look at those three things that Jesus talks about with Nicodemus, the work of the Triune God, he doesn't explain the Triune God because you can't understand it. Just like Nicodemus couldn't understand how you can be born again, we can't understand what we just said in the Athanasian Creed. There are not three gods but just one. They are all co-equal, co-eternal and all these things. It's a matter of faith. It's not a matter of understanding.

That's why it's so wonderful that God said, "God so loved the world that whoever BELIEVES in him will have eternal life." It's wonderful that he didn't say whoever UNDERSTANDS him because you and I can't understand this kind of love. You and I can't understand how the Trinity works. It's a matter of faith. That faith is the gift of God.

Did you notice as he goes over those three things, the Father gives the Son, the Son is lifted up, the Spirit gives the gift of faith, as we stand here starting the second half of the church year, do you see how Jesus just summed up the three major festivals of the first half of our church year? The Father gives the Son... Christmas. The Son is lifted up for our sins. He dies and rises again and ascends into heaven... Holy Week, Easter,

Ascension. Easter... it's right there. The Spirit creates faith when he's poured out on people... the Festival of Pentecost.

God works as the Trinity, not so that we understand who and what he is but so that we believe that he has taken away our sins. The kingdom of the Trinity is not about our understanding everything. It is about us believing what God has said and then simply trusting in God.

Think of what that means for our daily lives. You and I are creatures that want to understand every last thing, right? From the time we are little, we ask "why" a thousand times when we are little kids, right? When we get older, we still think we should be able to understand everything. We think when God doesn't do things on our timetable or do what we want when we want, that means somehow he's mad at us (which he's not because he's taken away all our sins in Christ), or he has stopped loving us (which he hasn't because he gave his Son to take away our sins), or that he doesn't know what's going on (that's foolish. He knows everything). He's looking at this big picture. You and I are looking at this little slice that's just our life and our point in time. He's looking at how to have us closer to him for all eternity.

So you can't expect that we're going to understand when God talks about heavenly things, that he is working all things for our good, because we can't even understand the earthly things, just like Nicodemus. What we see then is that it's a matter of faith. Faith that the Triune God is the only true God. Faith that he has worked to make us born of the Spirit so that we enjoy the blessings of forgiveness. Then that faith that tells us, that tells us our God will always be with us even when we can't see it or we don't feel it, we turn away from our feelings and our understanding and turn to the truth, that is God so loved us. Amen.