

Lent 2, 16/3/2014, Holy Trinity

John 3:1-17

“Have you been born again, brother?” Is a question I have been asked many times by well-meaning people who would term themselves as “born again Christians”.

This is how popular is the story of Nicodemus that we have for part of the Gospel reading this morning.

Now we read it on the Second Sunday in Lent and I am not about to ask that question of you.

However, if we look at the history of Lent it was a preparation time for Easter baptisms and this meant conversion time.

So Lent for us is a conversion time to renew our baptismal vows at Easter.

Now let us look at the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus and see how that can apply to us as we look at this Lent as conversion time for ourselves.

Who was Nicodemus?

First, he was a Pharisee, a popular Jewish religious group of the day.

This meant that Nicodemus was extremely religious because he had taken a pledge to keep the entire Old Testament law.

He would have been steeped in the teachings of the scriptures, and would have taught them to others.

Pharisees believed that keeping the law (which was God’s great gift to the Jewish people) was how you demonstrated that you loved God, and how you made yourself acceptable to God.

But Nicodemus was no ordinary Pharisee; he was “a leader of the Jews,” meaning that he served on the Jewish governing body called the Sanhedrin, an elite group of 70 men who oversaw religious and civic matters for the whole nation.

Nicodemus was a wealthy national leader who was sympathetic to Jesus.

He calls him “Rabbi,” a title of respect and, he adds that he knows that Jesus’ work and ministry is from God.

Apparently, he wanted to get to know Jesus better, so he sought him out for a one-on-one conversation... at night.

Some scholars think he came at night because he didn’t want to be seen by others.

Other scholars think he just wanted some uninterrupted time with Jesus, but whatever was the reason he came.

At this time the writer of the Gospel shows Nicodemus as someone still in the dark but who comes to the light.

Later in John's Gospel he comes out into the open to speak for Jesus and to bury him but for now he simply wanted to ask questions.

In the ensuing conversation, Jesus responds to Nicodemus' trust in the signs by telling him that he must be born from above or as some translations say he must be born again.

Nicodemus misunderstands Jesus by taking the words literally with a man trying to climb back into his mother's womb to be reborn.

Jesus explains that we have to be born of water and the spirit to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus, then, is offering a spiritual rebirth from above.

Jesus who comes from God is offering us a spiritual rebirth.

This is what is being offered to us this Lent: this is a new conversion being offered to us.

It is easy to stray away from God and this can happen at any age.

We go through the motions of prayer, of worship, of living a life in Christ and what we really need is a new conversion, a spiritual rebirth.

Will we look for the darkneses and misunderstandings that plague our lives and out of which we need to be born again from above?

Do we have the courage to open our lungs, our heart, our whole being and our life, to take a big breath to allow the Holy Spirit to carry us along on the winds of God?

Come out of darkness, of going through the motions into the light of Christ where we have been reborn from above with a new conversion to set us again straight with God.

These are some of the challenges we are asked to think upon during this Lent as we prepare to receive the resurrected Christ into our lives at Easter.