

Spirit Led Questions

King of Glory Lutheran Church
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John 3:1-17

¹Now 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.”

We believe God’s Holy Spirit moves us to ask questions. These questions keep our faith alive and growing. Nicodemus had great courage to ask even though Jesus’ answers might have gone over his head. There is Good News that what is born of the Spirit is from God! Even our questions....are often Spirit led. Praise God!

God’s grace and peace to you this day!

Questions have always moved the world.

Albert Einstein wondered why the sky appears blue. He found out.

Rosa Parks wondered why she had to sit at the back of the bus and it sparked a revolution.

Sigmund Freud asked about the human personality.

What will end this war?

How can we feed hungry people?

What will end this war?

Can we find a vaccine for coronavirus?

Questions have always moved the world. Perhaps Nicodemus felt the weight of the world upon him the night he snuck through town to go visit the infamous teacher Jesus. He was, after all, one of the religious leaders with a reputation to uphold. Yet he had to know some answers to his questions.

In the centuries since, we've tended to give Nicodemus a hard time. We say, "He was scared so he came in the dark. He certainly didn't understand what Jesus was saying! Boy he got confused!"

We want to pretend as if we might not have acted exactly the same way! How many of us have said, "When I get to heaven, I cannot wait to ask God...." Who knows what it will be like! The line may be really long and we'll chicken out with only one person left in front of us!

It took courage for Nicodemus to come. His fellow church leaders might have been very angry had they known Nicodemus was crossing this line. At least Nicodemus didn't get stuck in his ponderings without having the nerve to take a risk. So he came. He was humble. He called Jesus, 'Rabbi'. Bless him. For without Nicodemus we wouldn't know what we do about the Holy Spirit. Without Nicodemus, sports games wouldn't have posters quoting John 3:16, "God so loved the world!" Nicodemus you certainly moved the world!

One of the things I love about being with our youth up at camp is their questions. Get kids away from their phones, are outside in nature, singing silly songs around the campfire and as sure as water is wet, the Spirit has space to move. Hearts get opened a little or a lot!

So while we are painting rocks or hiking the conversation might turn towards those matters of the heart. "Why did God let my parents get divorced?" "I really don't like what my friend did to me."

Asking faith questions, can feel as scary as getting open heart surgery! It's like exposing our insides on the outsides. So to shelter the sacred we play with sticks in the dirt and keep our eyes down to protect the vulnerable.

Yet, if we're honest, we adults have felt the same way. Going to a colleague who we're guessing might think, 'You ought to know that already!' can feel vulnerable. Setting an appointment with a therapist or pastor, takes a little Nicodemus nerve. But then along the way we realize asking a question is just a question, it's not a judgement upon our character. Perhaps we could follow the children's lead.

A little girl finally got to attend a wedding for the first time. While in the church, the girl asked her mother: "Why is the bride dressed in white?" The mother replied to the girl: "because white is the color of happiness and it's the happiest day of her life today." After a little bit, the girl looks up at her mother and says: "But, then why is the groom wearing black?"

Questions help us grow, particularly faith questions. Our questions are born of God's Spirit.

In his answer to Nicodemus, Jesus said, "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'

Martin Luther explained it this way. "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith."

Luther describes and scripture supports the idea that God – through the Holy Spirit – moves us to ask questions, moves us to believe, moves us to understand the things of faith. Our faith questions are born of God's spirit.

Thus Jesus says – and I paraphrase – the Holy Spirit will birth you, bring you into understanding. It's like being born anew. What is born of the Spirit is spirit.

That's Good News friends! When we feel confused, or excited, or wondering we can trust... the Holy Spirit of God Almighty is at work in us! Our questions need not scare us or make us fearful of asking.

Why else would the Holy Spirit keep nudging Nicodemus out the front door until he finally went at the 11th hour? God knew Nicodemus' heart was ready to change. God knew this man would become a disciple of Jesus. Not only would he move the world, Nicodemus would end up moving God.

Listen! Later when his fellow Pharisees had arrested Jesus, Nicodemus stood up for Jesus by reminding the Pharisees of due process; Jesus could have a hearing to address the charges. Then after Jesus' death in John's Gospel, it is Nicodemus and another man who bring the spices and anoint Jesus' body for burial. They laid his body in a new tomb.

Could Nicodemus ever fathom the outcome of his late night meeting with Jesus would eventually lead him to lay his Lord's body in a tomb? This is how the Spirit works! God through the Holy Spirit works in our heads, our hearts, our bodies to get us thinking and doing what God wills us to do.

Don't be afraid of the questions! Without Franklin we wouldn't have electricity. Without Luther we wouldn't have the reformation. Without you....only God knows what we're missing!

Let's be a Nicodemus! Let's ask all the Spirit led questions to follow our Spirit led Lord. Amen!