

The Rev. Robert H. Malm  
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The Second Sunday in Lent

## Starting Again

The original Greek word, so critical in understanding today's Gospel, can be translated in three ways, and we have known each of these translations through the changes in the English translations of the Bible. In the original King James Version, we read "born again." Jesus told Nicodemus he must be "born again." In the next translation that we used for decades, the Revised Standard Version, we read "born anew." Most recently, over the last 10 to 15 years, in the "New" Revised translation, we read "born from above."

Words are important, especially to St. John, who writes that Jesus is the "word" made flesh. So, this most modern translation tells us that being "born from above" is to be born of God's Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives us new birth. The Spirit, and only the Spirit, can help us to be born anew, born again.

No wonder that Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees, a respected teacher, would ask Jesus, "How can these things be?" How does God help us to start all over again, be born again, born anew, born from above?

Jesus tries to help Nicodemus and, in fact, everyone to know that this is the way God loves us. God helps us to start again. God never gives up on us. God is constantly inviting us, encouraging us to know grace, to know love, to know forgiveness.

Nicodemus wanted to believe in God's grace. He knew that Jesus came "from God." Yet he was cautious, very careful. He came "by night" to meet Jesus. He really didn't want to be seen; he didn't want others, especially other Pharisees, to know how he felt about Jesus.

John tells us that when the Jewish Council debated Jesus' ministry, Nicodemus asked them to give him a "hearing" and learn about his ministry. And at the end of the Gospel, John tells us that it is Nicodemus who comes with another "secret" disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, to ask Pilate to give them Jesus' dead body to bury properly. Nicodemus seeks an understanding of Jesus; he wants to be sure to know who Jesus really is. Yet, at the end, all he can do is give him an extravagant burial.

Many commentators point out that this story of Nicodemus ends not at verse 17, but four verses later. Nicodemus' coming to Jesus at night is John's way of telling us about the spiritual darkness, the darkness that is so easy to accept, to live into, a darkness of sin and evil, a darkness of lies and deceit. The choice is before us all – darkness or light? This is how the teaching ends. This is how John's Gospel ends. Will we choose darkness or will we choose light?

This season of Lent moves us, with Jesus, to the events of Our Lord's last week in Jerusalem and to the Cross. We know that Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem. He decided to

confront the Pharisees and Jewish leaders. He decided not to resist arrest. He decided to accept the Cross. He decided to offer forgiveness and love, even to his last breath.

Lent is a season for us to reflect upon our choices, our decisions. Lent is a season to start again, to start knowing God's love, God's grace, God's light in a powerful and transformative way. Nicodemus was invited into a deeper relationship with Jesus, with God. We have this same invitation to grow in grace, to grow in understanding, to grow in forgiveness, to grow in love, to grow in the Spirit.

Can we be born again, born anew, born from above? God's Spirit can and does work in us for this new life. God invites us to leave the darkness behind. What is the darkness that holds us back from new life? Once we know, once we name this darkness, we can give it over to God. God will transform our darkness into Christ's light.

John 3: 1-17