

Vicar Lucas Cochran  
Sermon for March 5th, 2023  
Second Sunday in Lent

### **Gospel: John 3:1-17**

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.  
<sup>2</sup> He 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.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus 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?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.  
<sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.  
<sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’  
<sup>8</sup> The 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.” <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

<sup>11</sup> “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. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

<sup>16</sup>“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.

<sup>17</sup>“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.”

## Sermon

Hogwart’s Legacy! The latest Harry Potter sensation that is sweeping the nation. I recently bought this game for my wife because she is a Harry Potter fan. I installed the video game onto my PS5 and had it ready to sort her into her wizarding house in time for Valentine’s Day. All so she could live out her dreams of being her own character in the Harry Potter story.

As I’m watching her play in the early morning on February 14<sup>th</sup>, I realized something about the game that differed from the books. Unlike in the movies and books where Harry’s journey begins with year one of his education, in the video game the player starts out at year five.

Being perplexed by this myself I asked my wife why this was... She told me and I’ll spare you all the complicated details of why her character skipped four grades of schooling... but the strangest thing I noticed about this detail of her personal wizarding story is something that I also noticed taking place in our Gospel reading today.

You see Nicodemus comes to Jesus in our Gospel today and professes that he understands that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God. Because obviously who else but such a person could do these miraculous signs?

In my wife’s wizarding world what then happens to Nicodemus in this story also happens to her character quite often.

My wife's character being technically a freshman at Hogwart's, her schooling was rather at a fifth year level, because it wouldn't make sense thematically, I guess for a fifteen year old to be taking classes with eleven year old children in the game. But despite everything she learns about Hogwart's from her fellow classmates, occasionally those secrets of the wizarding school are revealed by someone who is younger than my wife's wizard.

What happens next is exactly what happens to Nicodemus. Nicodemus introduces himself and starts a dialogue with Jesus. Jesus then explains some very important information to him, that being born from above is the only way that one can see the kingdom of God. Just like in my wife's game once the important information is explained to Nicodemus he then does what my wife in her game does when she speaks to a younger student to learn new things. Nicodemus just like my wife asks a follow up question to the one blessing them with new information.

The reaction that Christ has with Nicodemus is very similar to the reaction younger wizards have with my wife, a supposed fifth year. Christ asked Nicodemus if he is in fact a teacher of Israel? After all it would make sense that if he was, Christ can reason that Nicodemus should already understand what was just explained to him.

What's different in my wife's game is that the younger students are more surprised that an older kid would bother to speak with them. After all I'm sure we can all remember the days of how the difference of even just a year in our youth seemed to be a much larger social wall to climb than as we grow older.

Christ in his conversation with Nicodemus is not so much surprised that Nicodemus asked him a question. But rather he explains

to Nicodemus something more important than the signs that originally brought him to speak with Jesus.

Jesus uses his words to explain to Nicodemus and to us what was really important about Christ being there. The Word, his words, are used to explain to us the gift that God bestowed on us with his presence.

That message, sign, miracle, or whatever other synonymous word we want to use for God's grace and love is explained in the first paragraph of this passage but is summarized quite nicely in that classic verse that is the number one Bible verse tattoo, "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".

Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus that the miracles and signs, yeah they are important, and pretty amazing to think about. But the truly important thing that he should rather be focusing on is that Bible verse we all have memorized from our childhoods, but can't remember who taught it to us. "That God so loved the world he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life".

That gift that God gives to the world Jesus explains more fully in our earlier verses, echoing the same words that John the Baptist spoke, that when this gift was given to the world we would be born of water and the Spirit. That the recipients of this gift would be later translated in our books to mean "born again,". That just as the wind is perplexing, astonishing and completely out of our control, so too is this gift of love that God has given the world in the shape of their Son.

A final word on a verse from this passage that I think is just as important as John 3:16 but gets glossed over and doesn't get tattooed

in my experience nearly as much. And that is John 3:17 explaining what this gift from God actually does. We know that God loves the world and gave us a gift, but just like my wife's game where you have to not just learn the names of spells but also what they do, what does this gift from God actually do?

Verse 17 says very simply the function of this gift of love. That, "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." That is what Jesus is trying to explain to Nicodemus and what he should be focusing on. Because that is the most important part of why Jesus is even there for Nicodemus to speak with. Because God loved the world so much that they sent their only Son to save the world, not to condemn it.

Amen.