

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 3:1-18

"The Son of Man"

In today's Holy Gospel there is a man, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Temple ruling Leadership, who came at night to speak with Jesus. He did not want his fellow leaders to be pointing a finger at him and saying, 'why are you doing this?' Nicodemus was a Pharisee and on the Ruling Council, and he came to ask Jesus some questions about some of His teachings and His miracles. Before I quote this, I need to tell you that there are several different translations that say this a little differently. This one says, "I tell you the truth." You may have read, "verily, verily." Or "Amen, amen, I say to you." I think "I tell you the truth" is the best way to say all of these things. Jesus told him *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* (John 3:3) Something must have confused Nicodemus, because he told Jesus that no one can be reborn into their mother's womb. Jesus clarified this for him saying, *"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."* (John 3:5) This new birth Jesus that is talking about is the same that John the Baptist spoke about in John 1:33, *"The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."* You see, having a relationship with our Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ will change you and transform you forever! Each one of us has a story to tell about how God cleaned us up and made us totally different than the one we used to be. Some of you have known and celebrated Jesus for as long as you can remember. Each one of us can testify – that means we are witnesses of what God has done in our lives. Each one of us has been transformed in one way or another.

Last week we celebrated the birthday of the church, Pentecost, the day in which the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles and changed them forever. We talked about the Hebrew word for spirit and wind are the same word – "ruach." Jesus tells Nicodemus in verse 8, that the Spirit of God is on the move, like a fresh spring breeze. Look at verse 8 on page 1650 of your Pew Bibles – John chapter 3 verse 8, *"the wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going."* We, most recently saw what the wind can do during our recent tornado – seeing the effect. What a wonderful example that is so true – and how we need to feel the winds effects on us – the Spirit of God's effects in our lives. Sometimes the effect is a calming breeze, and sometimes it is ready to blow you over! The Spirit of God affects our lives in such a way.

Now, Jesus then puts the ball in Nicodemus' court, *"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?" "Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony." "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man."* (John 3:10-13) Can you imagine how Nicodemus must have felt to be told this – to be told 'you are not getting it!' He is a very well-respected man and senior teacher in the Temple. But this way of knowing, and the new knowledge we get through it, is given by the mysterious 'Son of Man'. Nicodemus had never heard this in this manner before, in this way,

by this Man. As a renowned teacher of the Scriptures – he had to be familiar with the term from Daniel 7:13 of the “Son of Man” – but here he was right in front of “the Son of Man”.

Jesus then speaks about how Moses lifted the pole up with the image of a snake on it in the wilderness (Numbers 21:8-9) because the people were overrun with snakes, being bitten, and were dying. God instructed Moses to build a pole with the image of a snake on it. God instructed Moses to do something unique. He was not making an idol – because his brother Aaron had already done that and got in trouble. Anyone who looked upon the image of the snake – actually looking at it would be healed and live. Better than the best anti-venom made. And so Jesus was making the connection that the “Son of Man” had to be lifted up as well, and as result, *“that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.”* Jesus was lifted up on Good Friday, on Mount Calvary – on a cross. And it was not a snake on a pole – it was the Son of Man, Our Lord Jesus – on a cross.

The words that come next are some of the most famous and important in all of Scripture. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16) Jesus tells Nicodemus and the whole world – that God’s invitation is open to not just a small group – but to everyone! All that they need do is one thing, and that is to believe and be saved by God through His Son – the Son of Man. This invitation is open to the entire world that God created and loves. There are some people who reject this offer and decide to go their own way and do their own thing. It is kind of sad, but can you imagine how God feels? But God still loves them – and He continues to invite them. Slap Him in the face, spit upon Him, tell Him no, but He is still waiting, and hoping that your heart would change.

There is more – the world likes to stop right after John 3:16, but Jesus continued, *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”* (John 3:17-18) You are never going to hear this on CNN, or MSNBC, or some of the more liberal networks.

Whenever we hear John 3:16 - our more progressive friends stop right there and do not want to hear the rest. Why? Because it is convicting – it is the truth! These words of faith and truth make non-believers extremely uncomfortable. You might hear them say things like ‘oh, how could a loving God not accept other beliefs or other religions?’ There was even an Episcopal Bishop who called God the Father a child abuser – because He subjected His Son to such terrible things as going to the cross. I am sorry, and you might hear him say other things. But our answer should simply be – God loves you and He wants you to accept His invitation, it is that simple. He will keep loving you no matter how you answer Him. God is saying – accept the conditions of the invitation --- or don’t! It is that simple.

We are not done because Jesus says these words which immediately follow the Gospel, *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because*

their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (John 3:19-21)

We all live in the South, and we all know what happens when you turn on the light if your home has not been treated by a pest control company. Critters scatter when the light is turned on because the light exposes everything. This is the grace and forgiveness of God to those who believe in Him, and the judgement for those reject Him. Verily, verily, amen, amen, I tell you the truth – you cannot make this up – Jesus said it – do not question it! I pray for people who question this all the time, our progressive friends who say sin, what sin, I do not believe in sin, there is no punishment for sin, - No, No, No! That is not what Jesus said, that is not what God said.

What Jesus said to Nicodemus are some very unpopular words – words that have caused some religious leaders to reject Jesus's words and claim that there are other ways to God than Jesus. How sad it is that some people reject the Bible because it does not fit their agenda. You have heard me say many times from this pulpit that agendas and cultural changes should not dictate to the Bible – but we need to get back to where the Bible dictates to the agendas and culture to be in accord with the Word of God.

Jesus said in verse 14 of chapter 3 in John's Gospel – that the Son of Man must be 'lifted up' – and that "*everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.*" Nicodemus was so convinced of what Jesus told him - that he became a believer – and was there for Jesus at the very end of Jesus' earthly life. This is clear – Jesus' words say that if you believe in Jesus as Lord - He will be there at the end of your earthly life - to welcome you to His Kingdom. If you go to John chapter 19, Nicodemus brought a mixture of about seventy-five pounds of spices, with which to wrap Jesus' body within the tomb. He helped Joseph of Arimathea to put Jesus in the tomb. You do not do that unless you believe in the One you are carrying there. Joseph of Arimathea was also a leader in the Sanhedrin. You have got to believe that when Caiaphas the high priest was saying 'Crucify Him.'" That they were against it and did not want Him to be harmed. Here are two men who believed, and showed it, at the very end of Jesus' earthly life. We are so blessed that we know the truth and are called to share it – that Jesus is the Son of Man and He is the "*way and the truth and the life*" (John 14:6) and no one comes to the God, Father but through Him!