

## John 3:1-17 - Curiosity Isn't Believing

Nicodemus was a modern man. He had no idea if Jesus were the Messiah but he was curious about Jesus. He did not know much of the Kingdom that Jesus was about, but he was curious. He was not ready to risk anything and so he came to the Lord under the cover of darkness, but he was curious. Maybe he was Lutheran as well. "What does this mean?" We get Nicodemus because he is one of us. We are curious, too. We have all kinds of questions about the Bible. Who did Adam's sons and Noah's grandsons marry? Just how did creation come to be in 7 days? What kind of kid was Jesus growing up? We are curious, too. But curiosity is not faith.

Faith is not curiosity. Faith is trust. The truth is we do not have to find Christ interesting or engaging in order to believe in Him. Believing in Jesus is not answering all our curious questions. Faith is about answers but not the ones that appeal to our reason or our senses. To believe in Jesus is not to unpack the mystery or crack the miracles. In fact, it is just the opposite. Faith means believing what our eyes do not see, our minds do not comprehend, and we find completely unreasonable. Faith does not make sense of things nor does it render God understandable. Faith trusts where reason ends, where curiosity is left unfulfilled, and where wonder is left unanswered. Nicodemus was not sure he was ready to risk faith; are you?

Nicodemus began by looking for a way to crack the Bible as if it were written in code. The law appealed to him just as it appeals to us because it seems so very sensible. You get what you deserve. Do bad and you will be punished; do good and you will be rewarded. Screw up and you have to fix it. But Jesus did not come to bolster the old law but to fulfill it, not to give us a new one but to transform us. He came as the Messiah who fulfills the old covenant and establishes a new one by His blood. This covenant we meet on the ground of faith.

Faith trusts the Word of the Lord. It is not about how you are born anew but where this birth is given, not about when it fits your interest or schedule but, when this new birth is offered, by water and the Word. Faith is not curiosity but trust that meets God where God has chosen to be found. Faith trusts the Word of Christ. It is not about where the Spirit is but trusting that where the Word and Sacraments are, the Spirit is at work for you and in you, bringing you the gifts and promise embedded in water, the Word, and bread and wine.

Faith trusts the Word of Christ. Faith is not about understanding God so that you can predict Him or work Him for your own ends or control Him so that He does what you want. Faith believes what our minds will never understand and what our reason finds scandalous and offensive. What does Jesus say? Blessed are those who are not offended by Me. Nicodemus was curious but he was not ready to risk everything on something he did not get. **"How can this be?"** He was not yet ready to receive the testimony of Jesus.

The shock is not that Nicodemus was embarrassed by his curiosity so that he came to Jesus under the cover of darkness, or that he wanted to understand Jesus before believing in Him. No, the shock is that Jesus has time for Nicodemus at all, that Jesus did not write him off—or us. We seek a reasonable faith that we can understand but the Gospel meets us on the plain of faith—it is a mystery not to be unpacked but simply to be believed. The Spirit leads us to see and believe what remain a conundrum to eyes and reason.

Jesus is in the water. Life is in the water. The Spirit is in the water. The Kingdom of God is in the water. By water and the Word, Jesus is in me and I am in Him. In the water I died and now a new person was born from that death to rise up in Christ and live not the same old life but a new life, a deathless life, a holy life, a life of good works the Law could not make us do but Christ does in us and through us.

For God so loved the world ... for God so loved you. This is not some truth proposition framed for our minds to digest but where the wise of this world must lay aside their wisdom, the curious make the big jump into the unknown of faith, the sinner finds forgiveness, and the dead are given new and everlasting life. It happens not because we get it but because He has gotten us, by His blood, claimed in baptism, formed us to faith by the Spirit, and made us confident in what we cannot see.

Luther put it this way: *“If I now seek the forgiveness of sin, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there. Nor must I remember the sufferings of Christ, for I will not find forgiveness there either. But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which is won on the cross ...”* It is not water only or mere human words or simple bread and wine. These are the means of grace.

Where the Spirit works, He leads you to the place where forgiveness is given, where new life is imparted, where there is food for the journey, where death comes to an end, and where hope lives eternal. That is where the Word is placed in water, where the Word enters our ears and our sins fall away, and where the Word meets bread that is Christ’s body and wine that is His blood.

For God so loved the world ... how could God love a world so far from Him and far from the life He created us for and how wicked and evil? Who cares how! We are not saved by a curiosity satisfied by a reasonable explanation but by the Christ who suffers and dies for our sins and is raised for our eternal life. And where this Christ is, there is the Spirit, there is forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Spirit is constantly pointing our hearts and minds to Christ - not in a memory or an imagination but the Christ hidden in water, present in bread and wine, and who speaks through the voice of the Pastor forgiving our sins.

Do not marvel at how this happens, says Jesus. Believe it. Those who are born of the Spirit are not the curious seeking explanation but the sinners seeking forgiveness, not the wise seeking more wisdom but the wicked seeking righteousness, not the holy seeking holiness but the unclean

who seek to be washed clean inside and out. Risk it all. Believe. And believing, live the new life He has given.

And to all who believe, He gives power to become the children of God. This is how radical the Kingdom of God is. We meet it not in lofty explanations but in the promise hidden in water, Word, bread and wine, and trusted by faith. The curious will find Jesus wanting but the sinner will find in Him all that they need and more than they desire. Come, believe and live.