

Sermon – Port Macquarie – 17th October 2009 – John 3 1-17:

Jesus is our Teacher:

When you hear of teachers what comes to mind. Is it not our days at school plus the lessons and the endless home work given so that we can learn and take our place in society? Or maybe it is a particular teacher who was part of your school journey or one who spent extra time on us to make sure that we achieved our best potential.

When Nicodemus meets up with Jesus at night that is what he calls Jesus – teacher – for in Jesus Nicodemus recognized that Jesus came with a message, a message with God’s blessing. Just as the teachers we faced during our school years came with a message of academia, Jesus came with a message of salvation and that the kingdom of God is near.

Nicodemus comes in the dark just like many of us when we search for faith, or in the search for answers to many of life’s problems and questions. Such as why do bad things happen to good people or why did my favorite pet have to die, and other questions that leave us groping in the dark in our confusion.

Now Nicodemus knew a thing or two as he was a Pharisee for his opening statement to Jesus was – “We know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one could do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God”

So when Jesus responds to Nicodemus’s statement with one of his own – that to enter the Kingdom of God he was teaching about one needed to be born from above. Some bible versions say born again but the Greek word used (*anathen*) is a bit ambiguous on the matter. Also Jesus says that this new birth is to be by water and spirit.

By water because we are sinful by nature and we need to be constantly washed of our sins, cleansed of our sins, purified of our

sins, all the time. Why all the time? Because by nature, we are sinful and unclean, for that is just the way it is with us human beings. By nature, we get stressed out. By nature, we do all kinds of dumb things. And we constantly need our sinful lives washed clean with the cleansing waters of God's forgiveness.

By spirit for as Jesus also points out to Nicodemus for one to be born from above can only happen at the hands of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately Nicodemus misses the point again and goes, as most of us would, for the physical and responds accordingly with a question." How can this be, how can one re-enter their mothers womb. I am a bit to large for that exercise.

Jesus answers Nicodemus by acknowledging that he too is a teacher, a teach of the Jews, yet with all the knowledge and learning that he has he still doesn't get what Jesus is on about.

So what was Jesus getting at when he said that to enter the Kingdom of God one needed to be born from above and that this new birth is to be by water and spirit.

Jesus was teaching that this comes by listening to his words and letting the spirit of God open his good news message up to Nicodemus and to you and me. For that good news is simple, really. Not just so that you must be born again, but so that you can be. That even if you've made a big mess of your life, a reboot of the system, a restoration of your relationship with God, is possible and you can start all over again with a clean slate.

Now we know that every single person on this planet is a living, breathing miracle and the very handy work of God and is made in God's image. But that does not preclude us from switching off to the lessons of our teacher and from making subsequent blunders.

Just as when we did not listen to our teachers as we grew up and paid the price with poor grades, detention, extra home work and any other devious punishment the system could think of. If we do not listen to the good news we will face the consequences, which for us is a life that is not based on Jesus.

In Matthew 7: 24-27 & Luke 6 : 46ff we have the parable – Jesus liked to use parable - of building on stone and on sand and the consequences of building on sand when the storms of life hit us. Our house/ our lives usually come down around our ears or at least sag considerably. The parable points out that Jesus is our rock – our bedrock - and if we have him as our base and place our foundations of him then we will stand firm when the storms come.

In Luke 6: 46 & 47 we read *“Why do you keep on saying that I am your Lord, when you refuse to do what I say?
Anyone who comes and listens to me and obeys me
is like someone who dug down deep and built a house on solid rock.
When the flood came and the river rushed against the house, it was built so well that it didn't even shake”.*

How do we have Jesus as our rock, we do so by listening to his teaching putting these lessons into practice and accepting him as our personal Lord and Saviour. Unfortunately many of us are a bit like Nicodemus, we have the head knowledge but through spiritual blindness or deafness we have not let the Holy Spirit open that word for us and have stunted our new birth.

Now I am a big fan of being born from above/born again for it has happened to me. I knew of God & Jesus for many years until I allowed the word, the good news that Jesus is bringing still today to become alive in me and change my life. This became for me a new birth in my relationship with God through Jesus.

That doesn't mean I have not tripped up on my journey, I have and usually because I have turned a deaf ear to what God is saying. However I know that I can return to the classroom, repent of my errors and start to hear the message afresh.

This same rebirth in your life as a Christian is available to you also. It is hard just as anyone who has given birth knows that the process is not so simple or easy, it involves pain and discomfort and it takes time, sometimes a long time. Just ask any women who has given birth to a child about the time it takes and the pain.

In my case it took 40years - I was a slow learner. It also takes effort on our part, effort to heed the teachings of Jesus and to put them into practice.

For that is how it should be for new life, like faith itself, comes hard. So, yes, to have genuine faith in Jesus the Christ as yours and my personal saviour, you do need to be born again from above. Maybe you do have to struggle and go through the labour because you are giving birth to something new inside of you and maybe that something is not just faith or a renewed faith but a new you. The you that God created you to be and that Jesus came to save and restore to the Kingdom of God both in the now and in the time to come.

Nicodemus had come to Jesus in the night seeking direction and Jesus gave it to him, that he needed to be born again. He Jesus the teacher gave Nicodemus a lesson in life and where he was missing the message, for the man Jesus was the Incarnate Son of God, the word in the flesh.

Now you can be a person who is fifteen or twenty-five or forty-five or sixty-five and eighty-five and you have drifted away from God. Things aren't quite right in your life. The Nicodemus' in this room do not have to be older than sixty-five, for Nicodemus' can be of any age or gender, so girls this message includes you also, for you too are made in the image of God.

You start to have the habits of faith without the heart of faith and you have the structures of faith without the Spirit. You can be going through the rituals but you don't have the real thing or you are going through the patterns of faith but you no longer have the power of faith.

If you have ever come to that time in your life, when things aren't quite right, when your religion has become more of a ritual than a real thing, when it is more of a pattern than power, when it is more structure than Spirit, we then need to come to Jesus' home, rap on his door and say, "Jesus, I need some help. I've got a problem ... here... in my heart. It is not quite right."

I feel from our message today that this is where Nicodemus was. He had the rituals down pat but there was no life in him for he had missed the message, the lessons, of the scriptures that he had.

The lessons of Jesus, relevant in Nicodemus's day, still have the same relevance for us today and if we get it wrong there is no detention, or extra homework etc, we just miss out on the joys of the Kingdom of God. But to hear him, heed his words and allow them to be opened to us through a new birth from above is worth the pain and enables us to be the people God wants and created us to be.

Why is this so? In John 3:16 & 17 we read *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

Thus God has a plan for you and me and that plan is Jesus. So being born again, being born from above, being re-born spiritually, involves recognizing Jesus for who he is and believing in him. It means receiving by faith God's free gift of forgiveness that is offered by Jesus through his sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf.

There is no standard conversion experience; one person may accept Jesus Christ as Lord in one shattering moment, and for another there may be an uninterrupted process and development. But in these differences there remains one constant factor – there must be in every life a point of decision, a moment when you choose to follow Christ or not.

So if you are already a believer, a follower of Jesus, what is it in your life that you currently depend on more than Jesus? Nicodemus had his heritage and law keeping. So what is the issue in your life that is preventing you from making that 100% commitment?

If you are not what issue is preventing you from saying yes to Jesus?

School is still in folks, and will be until we leave this life, or Jesus returns, whichever comes first, so please pay attention to you teacher Jesus, heed his message and make the grade, for the rewards are

great, they are eternal. If you still have not said yes to Jesus, or your life needs a reboot, now is the time to do so, for to know Jesus is to know life, life eternal.

For our God is one who offers to you and to me and to everyone the chance to be born again, the it is a daily decision for each of us to listen to Jesus and to follow his teaching.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ this life is full of uncertainties, having Jesus at the centre of your & my life on a daily basis is the only sure way to go.

The choice to follow Jesus, or not, is yours alone to make. My prayer is that today you make the right choice.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit ---

Micheal Perrott: