

5/27/2018

“Celebrating New Life in Christ”

Scripture: John 3:1-17

Trinity Sunday

Peace with Justice Sunday

Today we celebrate the mystery, blessings and challenges of living a new life in Christ.

I still remember a young couple at a previous church of mine who tried for several years to have a child. Finally, even after costly medical attempts, they gave up really trying. But, as God would have it, their prayers were answered, and they gave birth to an adorable baby girl they named Hope. No one or nothing could be more of a blessing for them and their family. And, it was my joy to have baptized her shortly before her first birthday.

Just as that couple hoped so much for the birth of their child, so God hopes for and offers new life to each person who truly desires and seeks it.

Today’s gospel reading from John includes perhaps the favorite or most remembered verse of Christian believers -- John 3:16. But those beloved words begin with instruction by Jesus to Nicodemus, a most respected and revered member of the Jewish Sanhedrin or High Council.

Nicodemus acknowledges that Jesus has come from God and performs miraculous signs. But Jesus does not dwell on his miracles. Jesus knows that Nicodemus has come to Jesus, because he seeks God’s kingdom.

† Jesus said to him: **“no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again/anew/from above.”** (NRSV,CJB,NIV) That last word in the Greek means all three.

When Nicodemus thinks and replies only in terms of earthly, natural or fleshly birth, Jesus answered (v.5-6), **“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”**

It is a spiritual birth, or rebirth, of which Jesus speaks. **It is coming to life – new and eternal – in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.**

He likens new birth by the Spirit to the coming of a wind (which, by the way, is the same word for spirit in both Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the bible). That Holy Spirit, which gives new life, moves as God pleases into and upon the lives of human beings giving new life in Christ. That is something to celebrate indeed!

So, first remember that Jesus says **new birth is a gift of God**. I am eternally grateful to God for that new life I have received in Christ! I may not remember the exact date I received that gift of new life, but I thank God and celebrate my life in Christ today and every day.

† **There is also a second component of that rebirth. It is our will, our faith.**

Jesus said (14-16),

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ‘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.’”

In speaking of Moses, he refers to God’s instruction to Moses to make a serpent or snake and place it on a pole, so that when people were bitten by a poisonous snake, they could look at it and be healed (Numbers 21:9).

The cross of Jesus would serve as that upon which those who wanted to be healed of sin could look upon and be healed. By acceptance and faith in Jesus Christ, one can be made whole and receive new and eternal life. This is how God loved the world – through Jesus the Christ.

So, we celebrate that new life in Christ today by acknowledging the mystery and work of the Holy Trinity in Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

You may know someone or pray for them, hoping that they will come to know and believe in Jesus Christ. You can bear witness to God’s saving grace in your life, and show them God’s love as Jesus has taught us. But, it is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit to touch their hearts and open their eyes.

And, once the Holy Spirit has come upon them, and they have received Jesus as Savior and Lord, we can be assured that they are in Christ. The process of transformation is taking place even as with ourselves.

As the Apostle Paul said, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17-19 NIV)

So remember to celebrate your surrender of self to God, trusting in Jesus, and inviting Christ into your heart and life!

† **And today we celebrate new life in Christ by observing Peace with Justice Sunday** in our United Methodist Churches.

We acknowledge a Triune God who calls us into Eternal Community of love, justice, and peace with God and one another, both here and now and in the age to come. We celebrate and grow in our new life by sharing God’s love, justice and peace with others in our Annual Conference and around the world in ways which not only explains or points others to Christ, but actively encounters and engages them as the body of Christ.

We acknowledge that it may not always be easy, especially in our own personal lives, to live new lives with God's values and standards of peace, justice and love as taught and lived by Jesus and others. But as we daily invite and rely on the Holy Spirit to teach, guide and lead us, we are promised God's abiding truth and presence to help us grow in perfect love and holiness. And, as we come together in ministry and mission, we are strengthened in our faith and commitment to serve the Lord and others.

Among our United Methodist current ministries seeking those aims are:

- Spearheading a peace ministry uniting Arizona border communities
- Members in Liberia being equipped to implement the denomination's Social Principles to address social-justice issues
- Pennsylvania students are educating their community about sex-trafficking at home and abroad

If you have not yet received that special blessing of new life in Jesus Christ, and would like to, simply pray after me . . . Lord Jesus, I repent of my sin. Come into my heart and set me free. Send your Holy Spirit upon me. Make me a new creation. Let me be a part of your kingdom on earth and in heaven. To the glory of God, I pray. Amen.

If you have just prayed with me, I invite you to see me following the service for ways to strengthen your walk of faith in Christ.

Yes, this is a day to celebrate, to celebrate indeed!

. . . to celebrate the mystery, the blessings and the challenges of living a new life in Christ.

If you celebrate with me today, will you say "Amen!?" **Amen!!**

John 3:1-17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." ³ In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." ⁴ "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" ⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." ⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ "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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.