

Genesis 12:1-4a

John 3:1-17

Romans 4:1-5,13-17

“Our help comes from the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.” AMEN!

“I’m beautiful in my way  
Cause God makes no mistakes  
I’m on the right track  
baby I was born this way.”

These are just some of the lyrics  
from Lady GaGa’s great song:  
Born this Way.

I won’t dare try to sing like the queen!

“Whether life’s disabilities left you outcast,  
bullied, or teased.

Rejoice and love yourself today.

‘Cause baby, you were born this way.”

That song speaks the truth  
that we are not created by mistake,  
we are born to survive and be brave  
in who (and whose) we are.

Made perfect by the One who doesn’t make mistakes.

So, since God creates us perfect and in God's image,  
why did Jesus tell Nicodemus that he  
(and everyone else) must be born again  
before they'll be allowed to see  
the kingdom of God? (Pause)

Well, as with most questions like that,  
there's not a simple answer, but that doesn't  
mean we don't consider our answers to it.

And, since we will be spending today and  
the next few weeks in John's gospel  
during worship we should turn our eyes  
to the particulars of the 4th gospel.

The first is, that John's Gospel always  
speaks directly but implies broader interpretation,  
or deeper meanings.

For instance, "seeing" in John refers  
to vision but it also implies "understanding."

"Sheep" refers to the animal *and* to people  
who trust in Jesus as the Good Shepherd,  
but Jesus was not a shepherd in the field.

You get the point right? :-)

The truth that Nicodemus comes

to visit Jesus “at night” means  
he came under the cover of darkness,  
perhaps because he was afraid  
some of his contemporaries  
would disapprove of him  
speaking to Jesus,

but also (and more importantly) because  
he came to Jesus *misunderstanding* Him.

A bit like the expression, “I was kept in the dark.”

You see, the broader interpretation  
is where we are led by John.

So, as their meeting unfolds,  
it is the broader concept of birth here  
that Jesus teaches Nicodemus and then, us.  
(Pause)

The direct understanding of birth is  
a profound experience of waiting,  
sickness, exhaustion, and  
physical transformation of both  
mother and child.

Women often acknowledge that their bodies  
are turned into something they didn't know.

It's said that there's a power at work  
within them that is beyond comprehension  
that leads to a purpose one cannot  
fully define.

There is only submission to the mystery.

It is this word, submission, that  
Jesus tries to teach Nicodemus,  
but submission to God touches our  
deepest fears.

It confronts our pride to be "like gods." (Pause)

We are told Nic was a member of the leadership  
within the Jewish authorities.

His identity will be narrowed down to  
a member of the chief priest,  
or a Pharisee in chapter 7 of John's gospel.

He's been brought up to submit  
to the institution and to the rules put forth  
by the powers that be within the institution.

So what we know about John's gospel, then,  
is that Nicodemus may stand as a single  
person that represents all  
the temple authorities.

The Pharisees and chief priest were  
misunderstanding Jesus and his message.

This “misunderstanding” is the same  
misunderstandings that other religious  
authorities have regarding Jesus.

Enter Christian Nationalism, right?

A movement that misunderstands in  
tragic and terrible ways about what  
Jesus calls us to see and know.

Which is that God is out of our hands.

Like the wind, God goes where God chooses,  
and we witness that movement at work in Jesus.

And that we are to submit to God,  
not to institutions, not to organizations -  
not to leaders that lead us away  
from loving God and loving neighbor.

Not in authoritarianism nor in the competitive  
nature of “saving souls,”  
that is often seen in Christianity. (Pause)

We listen and learn and move

within the breath of God into relationship  
with God's luring Spirit even when it  
blows us into places of risk. (Pause)

Reading this account now,  
during the season of Lent,  
we are reminded of the

nature of discipleship and the desire  
we have for transformation.

For even those who long to see  
the reign of God anew will be in the  
town square to dialogue across political lines  
and build bridges across theological divides.

It's risky and potentially dangerous, but  
that's what submission to  
the Holy Spirit looks like.

Which leads us to the Genesis reading  
that we have today.

What an incredible risk Abram and Sarai took.

They moved from something they knew and  
a life they were familiar with  
to something clearly unknown and risky.

It probably felt like they were in the dark at times,  
but still they went. (Pause)

Rev. Otis Moss III tells a story that features  
his young Black daughter dancing in  
her room at night.

He said, “One night around 3 am,  
I was on the edge because of threats  
made against my family due to my  
civil rights preaching and activism.”

He said, “I checked on the children,  
hearing noises inside, I brace for danger.

But instead, I found my daughter standing in  
the middle of the room spinning and  
dancing in the dark.

I began to say, ‘Baby, you need to go to bed,’  
but the Spirit stopped me.

The inner voice said, ‘Look at your daughter,  
she’s dancing in the darkness.

The darkness is all around her,  
but it is not in her.’”

This is what we are called to do.

“We are called to dance in this darkness,  
dance with love, with joy, with justice,  
with compassion, with dignity.”

The image of this child of God dancing in  
the darkness is Jesus' call to being born anew  
and becoming submissive to God.

While living in a world of racism, violence, extremism,  
and greed;

we refuse to let these things  
inside of us.

**AMEN!**