Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Born Again:**

**The Work of the Trinity**

**John 3:1-17**

**Holy Trinity**

**June 7, 2020**

Imagine yourself in Nicodemus’ shoes. Jesus told him that, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Nicodemus had issues, “What in the world is this talk? You cannot enter into the womb a second time when you are old?” From what little I know of the birth process as an observer, mom’s do not want to carry a 2 year old in the womb again, much less and adult child. Once was enough – MORE than enough!

Jesus ties to alleviate Nicodemus’ fears. He is not talking about re-entering the womb; He is talking of being born again of water and the Spirit. I wish we had the privilege to being witnesses to the washing of regeneration, where through water and the Word, a child is made a part of the family of God as the Holy Spirit works through that sacrament. Yes, sounds like a baptism!

How many of you dreamt of one day playing in the NFL? How many of you dreamt of being a major league ball player? Those dreams did not come true. Any dreams of becoming a billionaire or president in this assembly?

While the odds of anybody becoming any of those things are slim, it could happen. All things are possible in this country for those who put the time and energy into their dreams.

We are gathered to hear God's Word. The Word of God incarnate – God's Word in human flesh, Jesus Christ, speaks to us today, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

While we all want to “make-it-on-our-own” in the world, there is not one person who can enter into heaven on his own. At the same time, I doubt there is one person gathered here today who does not think – or who has not thought – that they are in some small way responsible for getting there.

Some probably think, "You cannot get into heaven if you are bad?" While it is true that God demands good works of us all, is it your being good that gains you eternal life? The problem is that we have a different definition of bad that God does. God says that any sin is bad, big or small.

Have you any sin? Of course. Does that mean, according to God’s way of thinking, you are bad? Well, as sinners you and I are certainly not good.

Our text for today takes great care to mention that Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Why? Because Pharisees were part of the Israelite elite, part of the ruling class. Christ had not only impressed the poor and the downtrodden with His miracles, but also one of their highest ruling figures.

So, what does this have to do with being good or bad? Pharisees knew nothing about regeneration. They did not know what it meant to be born again. Pharisees felt that they acquired holiness in a piece-meal fashion – a little here and a little there. They felt their decent life was how they earned God’s reward. Pharisees were not beyond striking bargains with God, especially when it was in their best interest.

Pharisees also trusted their free-will, that it was in their power to do either good or evil. They believed it was their own power which got them where they wanted to be.

Remember what Jesus tells us about the two men in the temple to pray? The Pharisee part looked up to heaven and said, " God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like that publican. I fast twice a week; and I pay tithes of all that I get."

Meanwhile the publican on his knees, unwilling to even look up, beat upon his chest and prayed, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Pharisees think that they are OK in God's eyes, patting themselves on the back for their good deeds. How many of you are Pharisees? Do you look around yourselves, even on Sunday mornings, thinking you are better than others?

"Look how they are dressed in church, thank you God that I'm not like that."

"It's about time Betsy-sue showed up one Sunday, how long has it been? Thank you God that I'm not like her?"

Yes, every single one of you has been, at one time or another, a Pharisee. So have I! We all feel that to some extent, God has to have seen our life, He must see that we are trying hard and that has to count for something.

Jesus sees through the words of Nicodemus, into his heart. Nicodemus believed Jesus was God someone sent by God – but not God Himself, "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."

Nicodemus sees Jesus as someone who must have God with him, but he does not believe that Jesus, this Rabbi, is God in human flesh. Nicodemus does see Jesus as someone to get close to. You know that if you rub elbows with the right people you too can have a touch of their success, power, glory, whatever. It is obvious that this Jesus rabbi has an “in” with God. Maybe if he gets close enough, some of it will rub off. Or, maybe better, he'll get in on a piece of the action.

Aren't we the same way? We align ourselves with successful people, and maybe if nothing else, we can pick up some of their leftovers. Successful people suggest that to be successful, you need to get around successful people, watch them, learn from them, rub elbows with them, something is bound to rub off and help you be successful.

Take this all a step further. Nicodemus thought this rabbi Jesus was close to God, so if he stuck around him, he could make sure that he had a shoe in for heaven.

Jesus' words come to him like a slap in the face, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." Jesus saw through the whole facade, “Nicodemus, hanging out with me is not getting you into heaven, that only happens in one way, being born again.”

You have hear that phrase before, it has been used and abused. You have heard it abused when you are caught in the grip of someone telling you that you have to be born again. It is almost comical that those who talk the most about being born again, teach that your being born again is something you can do.

Did you have anything to do with your being born the first time? If birthing happens the same every time, is there anything anybody could do to be born again? And yet, there are many explaining what you must do to be born again, as if it is a decision you make, as if you or I have anything whatsoever to do with it.

Jesus shoots down our ability to do anything in this second birth when He tells Nicodemus, "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." It is the Spirit’s work, not man’s.

Do you remember your baptism? Our memory of those first couple weeks of life is a bit hazy. You had nothing to do with your baptism. Maybe your tears added to the water in the font used that day, but otherwise, it was done to you. I have sprinkled the water and spoken the Word of Christ which He commanded me to speak about 130 times, but I have never truly baptized anybody, it was God.

In every baptism I have done, I was only God’s instrument – the means which God used. God's Word was spoken as water was applied and God worked through that means to remove sin, to make those baptized His own dear children, and to work faith. You were made children of God in baptism, water was applied in the name of God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Father unites us to Christ’s death and resurrection in baptism, and the Spirit works through Baptism, giving and nourishing faith to make us each new creatures – born again.

Baptized into Christ we can now talk about the good works of the Christian. Good works flow from those who have been born again. The Spirit fills us with good things and the new man lives a new life pleasing to God. While we are now pleasing to God, the good things flowing from us do not earn us anything.

The good in us is now ours because God has made us new creatures. It is His working in us which flows through us, for we have been born again. Being born again, we are brought to faith in the one who was lifted up on the cross. As we are continually built in this faith in Christ, we have eternal life.

You are here because of a Triune God who has made you new, by Him you have been born again. As you continue hearing the Word of Christ, God works the continued miracle of faith in you, for it is only God who can grow that faith which brings eternal life.

I regularly remind our catechumens that only as they continue to be gathered around Christ, as they continue to be where the Gospel is proclaimed and delivered in Word and Sacrament, that God continues to build their faith. That is how it is with all those who are born again.

Each week we remember our baptism, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” These words remind how our God has cleansed us of our sins in Christ Jesus, and made us His own dear children.

Baptism is our daily life, for each day we bury the old Adam through contrition and repentance, and a new man arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Repentance is a daily rebirth as the Holy Spirit moves within us.

Each time we are moved by God's Word to confess our sins, that sinful man within us is drowned again in the blood of Christ. From this burial, a resurrection happens, a new man daily comes forth and arises to live for Christ. You and I are born again. We are the dearly beloved of God, His chosen children.

We are more than billionaires or famous athletes, or even more than the president of the United States, we are born again. We have the kingdom of heaven as our inheritance. We are the beloved of God – in the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit – born unto an eternal inheritance. Amen.