

Nicodemus asks, we too, **How can this be?** God, how His kingdom works, faith doesn't make sense to our reason. It doesn't make sense Abraham praises the Lord for the promise of offspring, a nation, the Christ comes through his family when he has no children and he journeys on knowing it will take place but not how. It doesn't make sense to look at a serpent on a pole and be healed. It doesn't make sense to Nicodemus. **How can this be?** It doesn't make sense your birth from above, entrance into the Kingdom, your entire Christian identity, guarantee of all the promises in Scripture -in water, Word poured over your head.

A very real danger even for the strongest, most experienced Christian. We listen too much either to our reason or other Christian's theology and turn faith into my feeling, my effort, my faithfulness. Something that makes sense to me. Instead of relying upon God, scriptural faith -pure gift, what He gives, is doing, has done, will do for our life.

We have *absolutely nothing* to do with being born! You receive. All that is asked of a baby when it is born is to breathe and cry and eat and live the life that it has been given. So it is with the things of God, Nicodemus. There's nothing a man can do, to be born from above, for faith; all the works of God. **By water and Spirit. And what is now asked of you is simply to live this life that has been given to you.** To breathe the Word of God, to cry out in prayer, to eat and drink the food your Savior provides for the forgiveness of your sin. Live your life as His. Repent of your selfishness, sinful talk. Don't listen to some of the worse advice ever, "to believe in yourself" and **fix your eyes on Jesus.**

Infant baptism clarifies the arguments. Jesus says babies can have faith. Abraham would say, "God, if you say infants have faith, I believe you gave it to them." Nicodemus would say, How can infants believe if they don't understand?

**How can this be?** Unless we have the concrete forms of the means of grace, found at altar, font, pulpit, liturgy of the Word, we would then look to meet God only with our reason, our feelings. This is not how Scripture speaks; not what Jesus says. Not how God works.

Our strength in temptation, our refuge in trouble, our confidence in doubt are not based in our feelings and human reason.

**How can this be?** His kingdom –from the water and Spirit of His baptismal work in you -to the bread and wine of His body and blood -to the living voice of His Word that speaks and bestows what it says. His Word calls into existence things that are not. Temptation, trouble, doubts rob us of these things and call into question everything we want to believe.

Your reason, your feelings will tempt you to believe God loves you more when you're good than when you've sinned. It's true God delights in your good works rather than sins, but that's not the same as His love. If you believe His love for you changes according to your behavior, you're saying that you earn His love by your good works—His love comes at the price of your obedience or

based on your thoughts, not Christ's blood. Repent. Rejoice our Lord's love is not like our love. Your love for others should imitate the divine love, which demands nothing in return, selfless and giving.

When Jesus speaks of His death by crucifixion He draws on a type of His suffering and our salvation from the Old Testament. Israel complained bitterly against God in the Exodus, even after all they'd just seen of God's hand in Egypt and Red Sea. In the 40 years of wandering, His constant care, they especially will complaint to God and Moses about manna, bread, what God calls His glory from heaven. God sent poisonous snakes and those repentant were given healing from their suffering, spared death -looking at another serpent on a pole. Who would desire to look upon the sign of their suffering and death -for healing from suffering and death? How does that makes sense?

Ironically, modern medicine discovered antidotes to many snake bites from snake venom itself. The same of Moses serpent on the pole. The antidote to death was the sign of death. Counter-intuition reigns supreme in this Kingdom.

Today Jesus portrays Himself as fulfillment of the serpent in the wilderness, we look upon Him, are healed and live. **How can this be?** What an ugly picture He paints Himself! How does this make sense? Behold the antidote to your death. **As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.** Lifted up in glory on a Hellish stick to cleanse men of the serpent's most deadly poison. Look there! Look with eyes of faith to the agony of grace outside of Jerusalem! There flows the only love the world have ever known. And you cannot stop Him from loving you.

**How can this be?** His works to such underserving, unworthy, unlovable people, the likes of us. **Whoever believes** in Him - the One raised up in death and lives and reigns, will never perish, have eternal life. **Whoever** promises our Lord -no matter how bad, despicable, how wrong or mean or stupid or lazy or negligent or resentful or lonely -looks to Christ crucified, despite your past crimes; He brings forgiveness, healing, spared death.

Like Nicodemus, we wonder at things, also ask: **How can this be?** God, how His kingdom works doesn't make sense to our reason. God even still gives His glory in bread from heaven which Jesus says is His very flesh. **Do not marvel at how this happens.** Believe it. Risk it all. Our Lord calls His crucifixion His glory, how God loves, thus we see Jesus on the cross and there is nothing more beautiful to the eye. Jesus sacrificed for the sins of the world, even for your sins. That is how God has loved you. And the wounds He now bears for all eternity are not reminders of your sin, but of His love, your healing. You, born from above, by water and Word. He does all things necessary by baptismal grace, for your daily care, that you spend eternity with Him. By His love, by faith alone given to you -you see the Kingdom of God even now.