

SERMON
SUNDAY MARCH 1 2026

Lent 2 – John 3:1-17

My children Joel and Grace are now 27 and 24 years old. They each have their own birth stories. My former wife Christie laboured for almost twenty hours before being sent home with the promise of being induced the next morning. When she was induced, she laboured all day. Finally, around nine pm the doctor came in and said, “time for a c-section”. It was a good thing. When Joel was born his head looked like a conehead because it had been stuck in the birth canal for hours. His head was so BIG. He has a noggin like me. The nurse said “he weighs 9lb 13oz but you can say he is 10lbs because he had a little wee.” All things considered it was one of the happiest days of my life but I would never wish that experience on him or his mother again!

We all have our own birth stories and there are some that are worse than others. Some that you would rather not experience again.

I believe that when Nicodemus came to Jesus “by night” he was already in the throes of new birth. He felt trapped in his current life as a Pharisee. They were strangling his spirit. I have a fondness for Nicodemus.

As the gospel tells us Nicodemus went to see Jesus at night. He says to Jesus, “Rabbi, we know that you’re a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

Although we cannot tell the tone in which Jesus speaks, I believe when Nicodemus approaches Jesus, he receives a very sympathetic response. “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus was very confused.

Nicodemus responds, “What do you mean? You can’t be born again. You can’t enter your mother’s womb and be born a second time!” Nicodemus is right of course.

Jesus explains that you must be born of water and the Spirit to be born again. Only then can we enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Sound familiar?

We are given new life through Holy Baptism. God chooses to come to us in baptism through the Spirit and through water. God gives a holy moment so that we know that we are loved and will experience the blessings of God's kingdom.

Baptism is a very important rite in our church and in many denominations. It is wonderful to know that we are part of the body of Christ. However, I do believe that baptism can also exclude people from feeling welcome in the church. It can make people feel like there isn't a place for them in the church. They may even feel unworthy of God's love.

When I was first ordained, I used the traditional words to invite people to communion, "all who are baptized and believe are welcome at the Lord's Table." Slowly I stopped offering that invitation because I felt it to be exclusive. One Sunday a Jewish woman worshipped with us and she participated in communion. There was no temple nearby. She first began coming because she loved to hear the stories in scripture. When I asked her why she came up for Holy Communion she told me that she had gone to one of the neighbouring Lutheran churches and felt quite excluded when the invitation to communion was spoken. So she didn't go back. I don't know what motivated her participation. It really wasn't my concern. She was there. Who was I to judge. Who am I to judge anyone who comes to the Lord's Table for spiritual nourishment. Anyone who comes to the Lord's Table will never be turned away.

Who knows just how the Spirit is moving every individual during worship. The words, "All are welcome at the Lord's Table," during the invitation to the altar are very important. People have told me that's why they keep coming. They don't have to jump through hoops to feel welcome.

Jesus says, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." The wind moves us in many ways. People of faith, people who are searching, people who are looking for a place to belong and or perhaps if it's your first time here, God wants you to know that He loves you. We must invite others and share God's love with them.

It's a tough world we live in after all. The human condition is that at some point in our lives we will experience a lonely time, a time of sorrow, a time when we just don't know where to look for help. Our secular world is a roller coaster of good and bad affecting how we experience life. Like Nicodemus we need opportunities to be with God in the silence. Over and over again, we need time to be with God. God listens to us. Like he does to Nicodemus, Jesus does not turn us away. He waits for our prayers.

Baptism is a wonderful thing. It brings us closer to God. We're given new life in Christ. It's just one way we can be with God. It's a gift. Whether baptised or not we're all created in the image of God and are worthy of his love.

Never forget that you are God's child and that you and all are welcome at the table of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.