

“For God so loved the world...”

First Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a

God’s call of Abram and Sarai has a clear purpose—that through them all the families of the earth would gain a blessing. As they set out on their journey, they are accompanied by promises of land, nation, and a great reputation.

¹The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

^{4a}So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.

Psalm: Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills; my help comes from the Lord. (Ps. 121:1, 2)

¹I lift up my eyes | to the hills;
from where is my | help to come?

²**My help comes | from the Lord,
the maker of heav- | en and earth.**

³The Lord will not let your | foot be moved
nor will the one who watches over you | fall asleep.

⁴**Behold, the keep- | er of Israel
will neither slum- | ber nor sleep;**

⁵the Lord watches | over you;
the Lord is your shade at | your right hand;

⁶**the sun will not strike | you by day,
nor the | moon by night.**

⁷The Lord will preserve you | from all evil
and will | keep your life.

⁸**The Lord will watch over your going out and your | coming in,
from this time forth for- | evermore.**

Gospel: John 3:1-17

A curious Pharisee visits Jesus by night to learn from the teacher his friends reject. Jesus speaks to him about life in the Spirit and the kingdom of God.

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be

born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The 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. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Johannes 3.1-17 - Jesus und Nikodemus

1 Es war aber ein Mensch unter den Pharisäern mit Namen Nikodemus, einer von den Oberen der Juden.

2 Der kam zu Jesus bei Nacht und sprach zu ihm: Meister, wir wissen, du bist ein Lehrer, von Gott gekommen; denn niemand kann die Zeichen tun, die du tust, es sei denn Gott mit ihm.

3 Jesus antwortete und sprach zu ihm: Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage dir: **Es sei denn, dass jemand von neuem geboren werde,**** so kann er das Reich Gottes nicht sehen.**

4 Nikodemus spricht zu ihm: Wie kann ein Mensch geboren werden, wenn er alt ist? Kann er denn wieder in seiner Mutter Leib gehen und geboren werden?

5 Jesus antwortete: Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage dir: **Es sei denn, dass jemand geboren werde aus Wasser und Geist, so kann er nicht in das Reich Gottes kommen.**

6 Was vom Fleisch geboren ist, das ist Fleisch; und was vom Geist geboren ist, das ist Geist.

7 Wundere dich nicht, dass ich dir gesagt habe: Ihr müsst von neuem geboren werden.

8 Der Wind bläst, wo er will, und du hörst sein Sausen wohl; aber du weißt nicht, woher er kommt und wohin er fährt. So ist es bei jedem, der aus dem Geist geboren ist.

9 Nikodemus antwortete und sprach zu ihm: Wie kann dies geschehen?

10 Jesus antwortete und sprach zu ihm: Bist du Israels Lehrer und weißt das nicht?

11 Wahrlich, wahrlich, ich sage dir: Wir reden, was wir wissen, und bezeugen, was wir gesehen haben; ihr aber nehmt unser Zeugnis nicht an.

12 Glaubt ihr nicht, wenn ich euch von irdischen Dingen sage, wie werdet ihr glauben, wenn ich euch von himmlischen Dingen sage?

13 Und niemand ist gen Himmel aufgefahren außer dem, der vom Himmel herabgekommen ist, nämlich der Menschensohn.

14 Und wie Mose in der Wüste die Schlange erhöht hat, so muss der Menschensohn erhöht werden,

15 damit alle, die an ihn glauben, das ewige Leben haben.

16 Denn **also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, damit alle, die an ihn glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben.**

17 Denn Gott hat seinen Sohn nicht in die Welt gesandt, dass er die Welt richte, sondern dass die Welt durch ihn gerettet werde.

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

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¹⁶ Denn also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, dass er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, damit alle, die an ihn glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben.

Very popular text, well-known... Martin Luther called it “The Gospel in a nutshell”, as he felt it pretty much summed up the Christian story:

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

For God....

So loved.... Who? The world...

That he gave....his only Son,

So that everyone....who believes in him

May not perish....but have eternal life....

We sometimes see it on signs in stadiums...not so much anymore...

But it continues to be for us a testimonial of our belief, and for some the litmus test when checking out other believers:

For God....

Yet, it does not end there.... Jesus goes on to say,

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

How quick are we to judge, to condemn others who do not believe as we believe, or act as we act, or hold values as we hold them? It is as if we have forgotten that it is Jesus who saves, and not by condemning, but by loving, self-giving action.

We are to do as Jesus did, and continue to love, to forgive over and over again. Nicodemus is struggling to understand this, as he asks questions of Jesus: *“How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”* ⁵Jesus answered, *“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The 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. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

A companion verse to this might be one we had the other night at our adult study: ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known. (Jn 1:18)

18 *Niemand hat Gott je gesehen; der Eingeborene, der Gott ist und in des Vaters Schoß ist, der hat ihn uns verkündigt. (Jn 1,18)*

How do I understand who God is? Who is God for me? Can I accept that others might see and understand God differently, yet together, we can still be in community, and be about God’s loving action in this world?

Today is the day of our Annual Meeting. A time to gather, to review, to look ahead. Perhaps a bit more of a difficult time this year, as we continue to see lower attendance and lower giving. What to do? How to fix it?

Many responses to that question, which I am sure will come out in the conversations over lunch and during the meeting.

On Ash Wednesday, the Gospel text came from Matthew 6, with the last line being: ¹⁹ *'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

So here's a question I have often asked our Confirmands:

If the church burned down, what would you do?

Get to work on re-building? Take the insurance money and go somewhere else to build or rent a newer, more compact facility? Hand it over to the Synod and go and join any number of other churches in Kelowna?

Answers as you can expect, vary, and any of these would be a valid response.

Conversely, what if someone left a huge bequest – not unheard of – the Cathedral received a few sizeable ones the past few years, in my last church a woman left us her whole estate condo, cottage, investments – with an end value of \$800,000. What if someone left such a bequest with the proviso that it be spent to best serve Jesus' message:

¹⁶*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

¹⁷*"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

For at the end of the day, that is what we are to be about as a community – sharing God's redeeming love with all the world. How we do it is up to us, and if our faith is truly our treasure, resources are secondary.

Whatever we decide, may we listen to one another, and even when there are differences, may we still respect one another.

May our hearts lead our heads and our hands to be about God's work in this time and in this place.

Amen.