

March 8, 2020

2 Lent

Rev Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Gen 12:1-4a God sends Abram from Haran to go to Canaan.

Rom 4:1-5,13-17 Righteousness comes from faith.

John 3:1-17 You must be born again.

Play the song: Bullfrogs and Butterflies

Our Gospel lesson is the story of the Pharisee Nicodemus who came wanting to learn from Jesus. The scripture says he was 'one of the Jewish rulers'. That means he was one of the 70 Pharisees who sat on the high court, the Sanhedrin. He had committed his life to studying and obeying the Law. But after all that training, he saw something in Jesus that was bigger than his formal learning could explain.

Lots of people, even church people, are like Nicodemus. They have head knowledge, but no heart knowledge. People get involved in the church, but don't think too much about Jesus. They get involved in social relationships, but not in a personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus said that for somebody to have eternal life, to see the Kingdom of God, they need to have a change of heart. Paul wrote that it was the heart of Abram – filled with faith in God – that made him righteous before God.

Nicodemus was powerful: He had connections, and influence, and respect. But he felt that something was missing; and that emptiness brought him to Jesus that night. He had missed having a 'heart relationship' with God.

The phrase 'born again' has been used a lot, and in my humble opinion abused a lot. But it isn't a southern Baptist phrase, and it isn't a fundamentalist phrase. It's a Christian phrase, from the mouth of Jesus.

Nicodemus seemed shocked to hear it. He was shocked to think there was something outside his control that had to happen for him to get into heaven: to be born from above – born of water and the Spirit. He believed that his family tree as a Jew would assure him a place in heaven. But Jesus said that what he wanted had nothing to do with his ancestry, and nothing to do with what he studied, or what he did to earn God's favor. Like the story of Abram in the OT, what counted was having a faith-relationship with God. And we Christians are called into a faith-relationship with God the Son. **Being born again is about being open to change from the inside out**, by God. It is about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The very familiar Bible verse we see listed at every football game sums it all up. John 3:16 - "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."

It is not by our efforts, not by our position, not by our popularity, not by our acts of piety, and not by our good deeds, that are we get this promise of eternal life. It comes from living each day with faith inside us, faith in God that changes us from the inside out.

Just like bullfrogs and butterflies; we've all been born again.
And that changes everything.
Amen.