

Nic and Me in the Dark

John 3:1-17

Not only do we have family and friends who think about God like Nicodemus did. We also have a self-righteous Nicodemus nature that can't see the need for the Spirit of God to completely make us new everyday! Everyday we need the water and the Spirit to make us new creations of God! Every day we need to be cleansed.

Jesus came down to us and took on the darkness of our self-righteousness or the deadly venom of our spiritual superiority toward Him and On a black Friday he made the anti-venom by taking the poison of our self-righteousness and superiority into himself. He took all of it. Therefore God raised him up to be the anti-venom that give us a new forever life with Him!

Tell about the people of the church who should have known the most important teaching of the Bible but didn't. "God wants us to pray." "Do unto others as you would have them do to you." "God will take people to heaven at death." "Believe in God and obey Him." "Jesus died for me." What do you call someone who goes to church, and gives money, and prays, and sings? A Christian, or a Church-goer? Just because a fellow lives in a garage we don't call him a car. Just because someone goes to church don't assume he is a Christian.

Tell about Nicodemus – a by-the-book Pharisee, a model citizen. He was the kind of person we would like for a neighbor, a son-in-law, or brother-in-law. Also he was an expert in the laws of the Scriptures. He was a member of the highest ruling group in Israel –the Sanhedrin– and also a teacher of the Jewish religion. He recognized Jesus was a teacher come from God. When Jesus told him he needed to be born again spiritually, he didn't understand how & why he needed the Holy Spirit to create and birth him as a new person.

"What would you say to someone if he came to visit here today and said this to you?" "I believe in God. I believe in living according to the Ten Commandments. Jesus kept them best of all and I believe He is the greatest teacher about God this world has ever seen. To show my commitment to Jesus' teachings, I'd like to have your pastor pour that water you call baptism over my head as a sign that any thoughts or ideas that are against Jesus' teaching I completely wash away. I also want to show that I want to fill myself only with the teachings of Jesus by eating that special bread and drinking that special wine with all of you good people. I believe you call it Holy Communion. I want to do it today, but if you can't fit it in today, I could wait a week. What do you say? ...

Mentally raise your hand if you would say, "Yes, you sound like you believe what we believe, I'm sure Pastor would be glad to baptize you and invite you to commune with us."

Mentally raise your hand if you would say, “No, you sound like you don’t believe what we believe. I’m sure Pastor would be glad to explain to you what we believe and if you agree to Baptize and commune you.”

Jesus would say something like what he said to Nicodemus. “Nick you were born physically and very much alive, but you need to be born again by God’s doing. Without God’s gift of eternal life, you will perish eternally. God doesn’t want you to perish eternally. God loves you.

What would Jesus say if Nick says, “I don’t understand how I can be born again from God?” Jesus would say, “God can make you entirely different. What you avoided before, you will be drawn to. What you sought and loved before, you will turn away from. It is not something **you** decide to do. You can’t make a **decision** to be born again. You can’t **decide** to **accept** God into your heart. The Holy Spirit of God is like the wind. You can’t see where it starts or stops, but you can see what it does. When you were born you didn’t do anything to make it happen. When you are born again by the water and Spirit of Holy Baptism you **can’t do anything** to make it happen either. The Spirit gives you spiritual life.

What if our guest asks, “Why are there so many people who have been baptized as babies who say they believe in God, but they break the speed limits, they drink too much, they get their kids involved in sports instead of going to church? They don’t pray before eating. They don’t even know where to look for their Bibles, but they can find Facebook on their phones and “American Idol” on their Flat Screens. And they have foul mouths when they get angry or high. Are **they** alive spiritually? They don’t look any different from those who aren’t baptized.”

I think Jesus would answer this way. As God’s people whom he saved from suffering as slaves in Egypt made their way through the Arabian Desert toward the land he promised to Abraham, they turned away from God and in to themselves. They didn’t want the same food God supplied every day. They didn’t like having to ration their water until God supplied more. They didn’t want Moses to be their leader. They didn’t want to be with God. They wanted to go back to Egypt. So God sent them punishment in the form of poisonous fire snakes. Those snakes were everywhere: in their tents; sleeping bags, in the fields where they went for food; they were under the shade trees and by the water holes. People were getting bit, and dying! Others were crying out in fear and pain. “God forgive us! We were wrong to turn away from you! We have sinned against you. Please God save us from these snakes!

Then God told Moses to make a brass fire snake and hang it high on a pole, and tell the people that they would not die if they looked at that snake instead of all the real ones.

They trusted God's promise and lifted up their eyes from the ground to the snake lifted high and they were saved from the deadly venom.

Jesus told Nicodemus "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." In baptism we receive the anti-venom and receive life, but the poison of godless living, and thinking like Nicodemus that we are better than most people and surely shouldn't deserve to have as many and great bad things happen to us as others deserve. That poison is still in us and it can only be blocked by the anti – venom of Jesus.

You know anti-venom is made by injecting poisonous venom into horses or goats in small amounts so that their bodies can create antibodies to neutralize of the venom. Then the antibodies are collected to make the anti-venom. Anti-venom is created by one that has survived the poison. Jesus became sin, our sin, our poison. He took it to the grave. He left it behind when he rose up alive and victorious. He gives it to us when we get baptized and.He continues to provide us the anti-venom in His word preached on Sundays, and thoughtfully read at home on other days. He continues to provide the anti-venom every Sunday in Holy Communion.

Those who have received the water and Spirit anti-venom in Holy Baptism often are unaware that the Nicodemus-type-poison of smugness toward God, and pride in their own goodness as church-goers is **still in them** and able to **kill them** if they make Jesus someone you don't pay attention to unless you're in trouble. Often their parents and families think Baptism is a one-shot dose good for all time. Often their parents and families don't teach them the joy and discipline of turning their eyes to Jesus on the cross **daily** by thoughtfully reading a scripture and sincerely confessing their poisoned souls, and ask him to give them a **booster** of His anti-venom to forgive their poisoned thoughts, words, and deeds.

Last Wednesday night at our Lenten worshipers were reminded of the way their Baptisms' antivenom is boosted **everyday** with these words of Dr. Luther, "

1 What does ... baptizing with water mean?

2 A. It means that the old Adam in us should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance, and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, in turn, a new person daily come forth and rise from death again. He will live forever before God in righteousness and purity.

I love how Dr. Luther shows us how to pray every morning so that God can give our baptismal anti-venom a boost!

Turn to page 303 in the blue hymnal: The sacrament of Baptism the bottom right hand corner of the page says: "**The Significance of Baptizing with Water.**" What does such baptizing with water signify [mean].

It signifies that the Old Adam [my poisoned human nature] in us should, by **daily** contrition [sorrow over our nature] and repentance, [confession] be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts [poisonous venom] and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, [forgiven by the anti-venom of Jesus'] who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

What is the most important teaching of the Bible? That God loves you in this way: He gave his unique Son to die in your place, so that you will not perish in Hell but have eternal life with Him!