

Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

Come to Jesus (Week 1) - Nic at Night:



1) Our series premise = Jesus of Nazareth was, and still is, one of the most sought-out people in history, and, just like us, each person came to Him with their own specific motivations, needs, and questions.

2) Our first episode in this series was found in John 3.1-10: Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews, came to Jesus at night (for an unpacking of those terms, check out the beginning of the sermon itself).

3) Can you find yourself in the character of Nicodemus? - a) there are some issues in our own lives that we only want to bring to Jesus at night, out of the view of others, b) even longtime and devote believers can still be confused and agitated by Jesus, and c) at the very least, to the ever-increasing number of spiritually-unaffiliated in America think we - Christians - are the Pharisees.

4) So why did Nicodemus come to Jesus? - first of all, he saw something in Jesus that was distinct from his own religious experience and expectations, however sincere they might be.

5) Second, he heard from Jesus that spiritual rebirth is far more important than mere mundane religion (3.3-6).

6) This is a common theme in the ministry and teaching of Jesus: whereas religion looks at the external, or right method, form, and activity, Jesus is offering something internal, or that which yields a right heart, mind, and change (see, for example, Matt. 23.23-28).

7) And just like our 1st birth, our 2nd birth "from above" is done to us, not by us; our own spiritual routines and habits (prayer, worship, reading, small group, etc.) are simply our way of preparing or opening ourselves for God to work in us.

8) Third, Jesus adds a new metaphor - whereas religion is more of an assembly line which is trying to mass produce the same outcome over and over again, spiritual rebirth is more like sailing on the unpredictable wind of God's Spirit (3.8).

9) One of the Christian greats from the 1100s C.E., Hildegard of Bingen, gives us a beautiful metaphor for what our experience of the spiritual life should be - we are to be "feathers on the breath of God."

10) This 2nd "birth from above" is not instantaneous, and, like the wind, can move slowly and even not at all at times: the unfolding character in the rest of the gospel of John is a great example of this (see John 7.50 and 19.39).

Quotes Worth Rereading

Leonard Sweet, in *Jesus Drives Me Crazy*:

There is a world and wisdom according to normal. And then there's Jesus. It's not enough to say that Jesus redefined what it means to be "normal." Everything Jesus taught goes against normal. Turning the other cheek, going the 2nd mile, giving away our coat, washing someone's feet, heaping blessing upon those who curse you, living without violence, laying down your life for others – all these things are NOT normal, and in fact, normal people have a hard time even understanding them, much less living them.

The late Rachel Held Evans:

The Spirit is like wind, earth's oldest sojourner, which in one place readies a sail, in another whittles a rock, and in another commands the trees to bow... Wind knows no perimeter. The wildest of all wild things, it travels to every corner of a cornerless world... And the Spirit is like the wind, Jesus says, it is steady as a breeze and as strong as a hurricane. There is no city, no village, no wilderness where you cannot find it, so pay attention...

Keeping Nicodemus with You this Week

1) Here are three excellent devotionals from The United Church of Christ on John 3.1-10; you can sprinkle them throughout your week:

[Holy Invitations](#)

[Midlife Babies](#)

[Asking for Directions](#)

2) Read the rest of the story of Nicodemus in John's gospel (he appears in 7.50 and 19.39):

[John 7.10-52 NRSV](#)

[John 19.38-42 NRSV](#)

3) Being "a feather on the breath of God":

- Every day this week, pray that quote for your own life at least once. (You can pray it for our church too, if you like.)

- Toward the end of the week, take time to reflect upon how you felt the wind of God's Spirit throughout the week, perhaps in surprising or unanticipated ways. How did you cooperate with it, or how didn't you? (You can do this reflection in prayer, in a journal, or in conversation with a good friend.)

- There are two movie clips that came to mind for Pastor Chris when he knew that he was going to share that quote from Hildegard of Bingen, neither of which he had time to flesh out in the sermon itself: the first is the opening to the Oscar-winning movie, "Forrest Gump" (the first link), and the second is from another Oscar-winning movie, "American Beauty," but instead of a feather, it's a plastic bag (the second and third link below, the 2nd is from the movie itself, while the 3rd has the character narration stripped out and only shows the plastic bag with the accompanying movie score:

[Forrest Gump Opening Scene \(Feather at the Bus Stop\) - Forrest Gump \(1994\)](#)

[American Beauty \(1999\) - Plastic bag scene](#)

['American Beauty' - Thomas Newman \(from the 'plastic bag scene'\)](#)