

St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
The Second Sunday in Lent  
March 12, 2017  
John 3:1-17  
The Reverend John P. Carr

## **A Gift of Love**

Have you ever been at a meeting, conference or presentation and following the presentation there is a time for questions and answers? The speaker says that there is no such thing as a stupid question but instead of being comforted by that statement you sink a little deeper into your chair. It actually takes some courage and willingness to risk to ask what may seem like the stupid question.

Nicodemus is willing to take that risk but only if he met Jesus in the dark of night. He slipped over to Jesus' place that night to try to learn. He wanted to learn about Jesus. He was willing to humble himself to Jesus in the hopes that he would learn. Nicodemus wanted to know what Jesus knew. He wanted to know about the spiritual life and believed that Jesus was more than a teacher.

They discussed the temporal and the eternal spiritual life. Jesus describes that the new life, the eternal life, is born of water and the Spirit. He was probably referring to the baptism by John of water and the baptism by Jesus of the Spirit. John's baptism required repentance and a new start. The baptism of Jesus in the Spirit required a change of heart to live by the will of God as a part of His family.

Then there is the enigmatic mention of the metaphor of the wind and the Spirit. We can hear the wind and see its effects but don't know where it originated or where it is going. In the same way God brings about new birth, a new way of living through a spiritual change of heart. We don't know how He does it, but we can see its effects in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Nicodemus is a bit befuddled. "How can this be," he asks? Jesus points out that three things are needed in this new birth; the death of the Son of Man, the Love of the Father, and our responsibility to accept the love that God has shown to us.

Then in a story and symbol that Nicodemus will surely understand, Jesus refers to Himself in comparison to the bronze snake that Moses made in the wilderness. This is the bronze snake referred to in Numbers 21:4-9 that saved those who looked on it. The Israelites complained so much in their trek along the Red Sea that God sent poisonous serpents to afflict them. They begged Moses for mercy and God instructed him to make a bronze rendition of the poisonous snake and to put it on a wooden pole. When the people were bitten and they looked to the snake on the pole, believed and were saved.

The people who looked at the snake on the wooden pole were saved. Jesus said that in the same way the people who looked at Him on the cross *and believed in Him* would be saved. Jesus concludes with the passage that we all know by heart, John 3:16. Let's think about that one for a moment, because it is easy to say and a little more difficult to fully understand. I am not sure that we always realize the depth of what is being said. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."* In another saying, Jesus had said that *"there is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend,"* (John 15:13) and this is true. But think about what God did with His only Son.

God tested Abraham with a similar choice. Abraham was ordered by God to *"Take his son, his only son Isaac, who you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.."*

Abraham obeyed to the point of putting his son on the wood and taking out his knife to kill his son before an angel of the Lord stopped him. The angel who stopped him said, *"do not lay a hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from me."* Now, just imagine what must have been going through the mind of Abraham on the way to sacrifice his only son, his beloved. It is one thing to lay down your life for a friend or for your family but it is quite another to send your only son, your beloved to be a sacrifice while you will live. That is another thing altogether. Do you think you could do that? GOD DID!

We refer to the sacrifice of the Son in our creeds, in the Gospels and in all that is in Christianity, but think about it. What would make God offer as a sacrifice His only Son?

It is a greater love, than the love of one who would lay down their life for a friend. It is the greatest love of all. It is a love beyond our comprehension. God loves us so much that He was willing to go the final extreme in the proof of His love, in His effort to save us from ourselves.

*If* we will just accept His love as demonstrated in His sacrifice of His Son, *then* we will become a part of His family for eternity.

We make sacrifices for our mate when we pledge our lives to them and give up being solo and instead become part of a greater relationship. Men sacrifice to buy a ring to show how much they love their wife. Women become mothers and will sacrifice just about anything to help the children they love advance in life. They will sacrifice just about anything to protect, teach and help their child.

We can only get a glimpse of the tremendous love of God for His creation and us in particular. He wants us to be in an eternal relationship with Him. All we have to do is recognize His love and believe in the One who the Father sent to save us. If we look to Jesus on the cross and believe, then we are saved, and the love expressed in the sacrifice of Jesus is made alive in us. Amen.

