

October 6, 2019

SPIRIT – Born, And Born Again: And Who are We (Now)?

First Reading ~ *John 3:1-12*

The scripture Rev. Troy Perry preached at the first MCC service)

A certain Pharisee named Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, came to Jesus at night. “Rabbi,” he said, “we know you’re a teacher come from God, for no one can perform the signs and wonders you do, unless by the power of God.” Jesus gave Nicodemus this answer: “The truth of the matter is, unless one is born from above, one cannot see the Dominion of God.”

Nicodemus said, “How can an adult be born a second time? I can’t go back into my mother’s womb to be born again!”

Jesus replied, “The truth of the matter is, no one can enter God’s Dominion without being born of water and the Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is Spirit. So don’t be surprised when I tell you that you must be born from above. The wind blows where it will. You hear the sound it makes, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be possible?” asked Nicodemus.

Jesus replied, “You’re a teacher of Israel, and you still don’t understand these matters?”

“The truth of the matter is, we’re talking about what we know; we’re testifying about what we’ve seen— yet you don’t accept our testimony. If you don’t believe when I tell you about earthly things, how will you believe when I tell you about heavenly things?

Second Reading ~ *adapted from Paul Tillich*

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel our separation is deeper than usual. It strokes us when we have violated another life, a life which we love, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure has become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes, at that moment, a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: “You are accepted. You are accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name

of which you do not know...." If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience, we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed.

Third Reading ~ *adapted from Rev. Elder Cecilia Eggleston, New Moderator, Metropolitan Community Church*

MCC has a powerful future. I talked with a local church pastor the other day and asked, "Why is MCC still needed?" The pastor said: "There are several open and affirming churches in this city, but they do not give people space to explore their own spiritual journey, their own attitude to religion. These churches accept their sexuality, but tell them what they must believe. In MCC, we give people the opportunity to think about what they believe, to explore the connections between their faith and their everyday life."

MCC is in an interesting place just now. We see hope for our future, we know that God has work for us to do, and yet we are dealing with pain from the past, or even the present. In his presentation at General Conference, Brian McLaren talked about the danger that new religious movements can fall into, and he spoke about how, as some point, we all get hurt by the church denomination we belong to.

Taking time to understand our own hurts and the pain of others, to ask for and to offer forgiveness, to choose restoration and to be willing to let go of old stories that no longer serve – these are all part of reclaiming our founding values and moving forward into our future.

If we are not willing, as a Denomination (or a church, or an individual), to do our "internal work," even while we serve others, it will be so much harder to give our best to those who need us. We are not called to conform, we are called to transform. And we do that one life at a time, all over the world.