

Re-formation

John 3: 1-21

“For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Son so that everyone who believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.”

It has been said that this is the Gospel message in a nutshell, that if anyone really wanted to know what the Christian faith is all about, then all they would have to do is know these words and they would understand.

Except that there is so much more to the Gospel message than just than one verse. There are 66 books in the Bible which expand upon what it means to be a person of God, books filled with chapters and verses which all go way beyond this one line, calling us to love justice, to make kindness and to walk humbly with our God. As people of faith, we realize that the Gospel message is so much more than one verse. It is a way to become the people God created and calls us to be. It is a way to be in relationship with one another. It is a way to bring people into the life-giving presence of God. And it is certainly not a tool to scare people, or berate them or even condemn them simply because they do not fall into what we think “proper” Christians should be.

However, unfortunately, this well-known, beloved verse has been used to do just that. Over time, this verse has been transformed from the Gospel in a nutshell

to being used by many to judge who is worthy and who is not worthy to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

So this morning as we begin looking at how re-formation brings about healing and wholeness, I want us to look at this text in context. I want us to go beyond verse 16 and see what's around it. I want us to see how it fits into the wider Gospel narrative of God's grace and God's love.

We read in verses 17-21 this theological discourse about light and dark, belief and unbelief, and we realize that for John, this is a play on ideas, a double-meaning in regards to faith. In the chapter before this one, Jesus has just performed his first miracle by turning water into wine and at the end of the Chapter, we are told "many believed because they saw the signs of what he was doing. But Jesus did not trust them and he did not need any help seeing right through them."

Again for John, this is that play on ideas, this double-meaning of light and dark, belief and unbelief. It is not enough to believe in Jesus because of the signs. To believe in Jesus is to know him, to be in relationship with him, to experience him as the Word Made Flesh.

All this is background for our text today. In the beginning of our text, we are told that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, again this is a clue for us readers to notice how light and dark, belief and unbelief fit into this story. However, John

does not let us write off Nicodemus just yet. We are told that Nicodemus is one who has come seeking understanding, come to engage in dialogue with Jesus. In our text today, John wants us to know that Nicodemus is having a good faith conversation with Jesus, something others have not done or wanted to do.

Even though this conversation is filled with confusion for Nicodemus, he sticks with it. He doesn't leave in a huff. He doesn't storm out because Jesus won't give him all the answers. No, Nicodemus sticks with it. He continues to explore what it means to be deeper relationship with Jesus. He continues the conversation. He continues to move beyond unbelief, to move beyond darkness to light. Eventually, we are told that Nicodemus is the one who brings the spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial. This let us know that there was a deeper relationship between Jesus and Nicodemus, a deeper understanding of who Jesus is than simply recognizing him for signs and miracles. As readers, we realize that this encounter is not Nicodemus' only encounter with Jesus, that instead je continues the journey of transformation, he continues the conversation, he continues to become the person God created and called him to be.

Because that is what Jesus asks him to do, to be born again, to be born from above, to be born anew, to be open to the moving of God's Spirit in this world.

The thing John wants us to realize is that Jesus' role as the Word Made Flesh is to challenge what we think as people of faith. Jesus is always asking people in wider Gospel narrative to reconsider their thinking, to re-evaluate, to re-form what we think God is doing in our world.

Because the fact of the matter is, since the beginning of time, God has always been surprising us. God has not once played by our rules. God has not once abided by our time schedules. God has not once asked our permission to make the Kingdom God a reality here on Earth. Since the beginning of time, God has always been turning this world upside down, moving in and among us, bringing healing and wholeness for all of God's people in surprising and life giving ways.

Or let me say it this way....I blame Carl Rollins for this part. As many of you know, Carl did a presentation on the two natures of Jesus for Food for the soul this past Sunday night. He shared how he had never really thought about how Jesus is both divine and human and how our understanding of these two natures influences are ministry as the church. Then Carl started reviewing with us writings from church fathers, talking about the early arguments the Church had over this particular issue. And he ended his presentation by saying..."I guess even 2000 years later, we still haven't figured it out."

I left there that night feeling confused...confused because yes it has been a long time since I have taken a church history course and also because sometimes in faith, it feels like we are spinning our wheels, going over and over again, seeking answers to the mystery which surrounds God, which is God and never really feeling like we completely understand it all.

Because more often than not, I found myself saying, "God just show me a sign of what you want me to do and I'll do it" Or "God, just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it." ; only to receive no real definitive answers.

So I do what I always do...same patterns, same way of thinking, same going through the motions, to get the same results

But what if...what if faith really isn't about figuring it all out. But rather, faith is about breaking the pattern of our set in ways, re-forming how we think, re-forming what we think, re-forming our patterns by looking for hope, looking for newness each and every day, re-forming what we understand faith to be by opening ourselves to the mystery that is God, moving in and among us, bringing about healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

What if faith is really about abundant life, here and now, nothing separating us from God because we are it, revealed to us by Jesus so that all may be saved. Because isn't that the essence of the Gospel message, any way....that death and

darkness will not have the last word, that light and life will bring all things into being.

Again, I don't have all the answers but it is my hope, that as we continue our journey of becoming the people God created and called us to be, as we embrace opportunities for resistance and risk along the journey, that we continue to re-form our thinking, re-form our way of being, re-form how we understand God to be at work in the world so that we can fully experience the wondrous mystery which is healing and wholeness for all. Amen.