

## **“ God Loves Making Babies! ”**

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Continuing a series on the Gospel of John

John 2.23-3.9

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Now while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and trusted in him. Yet Jesus would not trust himself to them, for he knows all. He did not need anyone to give him testimony about people, for he knew what was in each person.

Now there was a particular person, of the Pharisee party, named Nicodemus. He belonged to the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one can do the signs you are doing unless God is with him.”

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born once again from above.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born from water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born once again from above.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

John 2.23-3.9

Adapted from the New International Version

“Born Again.”

What comes to mind when you hear that phrase? What does “Born Again” mean to you?

Here’s what I hear.

I hear a shorthand for a style of Christianity. I think of “Evangelicals” and “Baptists” and “Pentecostals.” The lines are not clear, though. Many in the United Church would call themselves “Born Again.” It is a big part of our own Methodist heritage.

When I hear “Born Again,” I think of a moment when someone is radically transformed. Before, they were stuck in sin. After, they are alive in Christ. Maybe you have experienced that profound transformation.

When I hear “Born Again,” I think of division. We’ve got “Born Again” Christians, and we’ve got the rest. From one perspective, the “Born Agains” are the only real, true Christians. The rest are going through the motions. From the other perspective, the “Born Agains” are weird and suspicious. The rest are normal.

Let’s do this. Take all those things we hear, and put them to the side.

When Nicodemus was talking with Jesus, he had never heard this stuff. He has seen Jesus in action, knows he is from God, and has come to give his respects. Jesus starts talking about being born again. Let’s try to hear this with Nicodemus, with fresh ears. What is Jesus saying to us?

## II

Most of us were born, I think. What did it mean?

It was a tremendous transition. We went from one world, and traumatically entered into a much, much bigger world.

My Dad put this sign on our front porch when I was born. It has my name and details. Also, my family: Mom and Dad. Very soon, grandmas and grandpas; uncles, aunts and cousins; and neighbours. Then, friends and teachers. Later, girlfriends, a wife, my own children, and more friends. Birth brings us into a family that grows.

Birth starts us off. We breathe, eat, and cry. Soon we are crawling, walking, and discovering. Birth is really important. Without my birth, I would not be. Still, the point is not my birth, but the life my birth launched me into.

**“Born again” birth is also about a new beginning. It’s about launching into a new life. It’s about joining a growing family. “Born again” birth is about entering into a much larger world.**

## III

Not too long after I was born, I learned how to hit and hurt. Grab and not share. I learned words. “I love you.” “I hate you.” I learned to lie. Honest!

As I have lived, I’ve rejoiced and been blessed so much. I’ve wept and been wounded so much. I’ve certainly wounded others. I remember watching a little frog hopping through the grass. Fascinating. Then I stepped on it!

All since I was born.

We are born, and we do what we can with life. Except it’s not just us. Others do stuff to us. Stuff happens, good and bad, and a whole lot else. That’s life. Your life.

I was born once. Stuff has happened. Someday, I'll join that frog. I'll get stepped on by something big. Frog might say I deserve it. She's probably right.. That's life. Who could hope for anything more?

Imagine if there can be more. **What if that is not all there needs to be? What if we can hope for more, and not just after we get stepped on for the last time? Right now. More in life right now. A new me, being forgiven. A new person, being made well. A new birth, becoming who God made me to be, finally.**

#### IV

Back to my birth. The doctor was late, so I jumped into the nurse's arms. No worries. I had it under control. I worked hard. It went well. Mom couldn't have done it without me.

Well, that last bit is true. The rest?

You get no credit for being born. It wasn't your idea. You were not in control. You did not determine the date, organize the team, or set the timetable.

I really honour Mom for what she did, but she was not in charge either. A woman told me she has never been as in touch with her body as when she was in labour. Also, so out of control of her body. She simply had to go with it. If she fought it, it was worse. Just breathe!

We are not in charge of our birth.

It is interesting, this phrase "born again." The Greek word that mean's "again," *anōthen*, also means "from above." So "*born once again from above*" captures the whole meaning.<sup>1</sup> It reminds us of who does the birthing.

Jesus says we need to be "born again." Then, he says we must be "born out of water and the Spirit."

Water: I think of baptism. Baptism is a womb. The water holds us, nourishes us, and washes us.

Water and the Spirit. The Holy Spirit. God makes it happen, this being born again.

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus keeps protesting. "How can they go back into their mother's womb?" "How can this be?" After each question mark, he is silently giving his answer: *it can't be!*

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1 Frederick Dale Bruner, The Gospel of John, A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 168 and 173.

We can't do it. You can't do it. I can't do it. Neither our mothers nor our fathers. It's beyond human power. It blows away human imaginations.

The Spirit blows like the wind. This is another interesting Greek word, *pneuma*. It can mean wind. It can mean Spirit. Jesus talks about the wind, to tell about the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> You cannot see the Spirit. You cannot summon the Spirit. You cannot seize the Spirit.

You are not in charge of your birth. Neither your "fleshy" one from your mom, nor your Spirit-birth from God. New birth happens. Sometimes suddenly, sometimes after a long labour. Sometimes as you'd expect, often in ways astonishing. Birth is mysterious, wild, and wondrous.

## V

What is Jesus telling us, and Nicodemus?

He is telling us there can be much more for us. Life is good. Our natural life is a gift from God! Celebrate it! Yet you were made for more. You can hope for more. You can receive more. Right now! A new birth.

Jesus is telling us about a new beginning. About a new quality, depth and purpose. About a new direction. About belonging to an even bigger family. About entering into a much larger world. Your first birth was like that. Your Spirit birth, that much more.

And Jesus is telling us this can happen, because God does it. God births you. The Spirit fills you, like life-giving air flooding your lungs for the first time.

Has this happened to you? Could it? Does it need to, this new birth?

Consider Nicodemus. He was a Pharisee, the most earnest and pious sort. He was a mover and shaker, prestigious and powerful. He was born into the family of God, the people of Israel. He was a good person. It's like he had come to church his whole life.

Jesus knows him. No one has to tell Jesus about Nicodemus, or any of us.

So Jesus says to him, and I think us too: If you want to see, if you want to enter, God's Kingdom . . . if you want to experience the fullness of life God gives, now and forever . . . be born again. Be born of water and the Spirit.

How? You can't make it happen. Remember, you are not in charge.

Yet you can ask, trusting that God loves making babies. Even us older ones.

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2 The same double-meaning works in Hebrew: *ruah* means both wind and spirit.