

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> - Minister: Rev. Joyce Yanishewski

First Sunday after Pentecost- *Trinity Sunday* - May 30, 2021

Words of Welcome

Sometimes I have so many questions. In fact, the older I get it seems the more questions I have. I have many more answers and much more understanding as well, but the questions are always there. Questions about life, death, how people interact and behave, and certainly questions about faith and Jesus. We are going to consider what we know of a man called Nicodemus and his questions and faith. Join me for that and as we begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Let us worship the One
who spoke in the beginning and created something out of nothing.

Let us worship the One
who took on the clothing of humanity to set those who were oppressed free.

Let us worship the One whose Spirit rests continually upon us,
calling us from sorrow-filled endings to bright new beginnings.

~ from *Watch Night Service 2016*, written by Rev. J. Lee Hill, Senior Pastor,
Christian Fellowship Congregational UCC of San Diego. Posted on the Worship Ways
page of the United Church of Christ website. http://www.ucc.org/worship_worship-ways

In the Christian Church we refer to today as Trinity Sunday in which the relationship of overflowing love of between God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit is celebrated. The hymn *Thou who's almighty word* speaks of each person of the Trinity.

Hymn

Thou who's almighty word

291

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Thou whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard
and took their flight,
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray
let there be light! | 2. Saviour who came to bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
now to all humankind
let there be light! |
| 3. Spirit of truth and love,
lifegiving, holy Dove,
speed forth thy flight;
move o'er the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light! | 4. Blessed and holy Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world, far and wide,
let there be light! |

Words and Music:: public domain

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God of Mystery and Mercy,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we meet you in wonder as the Blessed Trinity.
You are the Ancient of Days, eternal and unchanging;
yet you are the Source of each new day, renewing all things.
In Christ, you encounter us in whatever each day brings
with a heart that beats in love for us.
Through the Spirit, you breathe life into what is growing older,
energizing us to serve you in good times and hard times.
In the mystery of the Trinity, you are always with us
and so we bring you our praise and worship
to join in your dance of life and love,
Holy One and Holy Three, now and ever more.

Holy and Healing God,
slow to anger and swift to forgive,
you have shown us the depth of your love day by day,
yet we are reluctant to love others even a little.
You have shown us compassion and forgiveness,
yet we turn away from one another for even small slights.
We save our concern for those most like us.

Forgive us.

Create in us clean hearts and a desire to begin again with you and with one another.
Give us the courage to forgive each other and know your healing grace.

God of wisdom, with the wind of your Spirit, open our minds and hearts to receive
your life-giving Word through the scriptures. Energize us to follow Christ, your Living
Word, wherever the Spirit moves us. Amen.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. First Sunday after Pentecost- *Trinity Sunday*, May 30, 2021 Year B.

Assurance of Pardon

Here, in this moment the Spirit of gentleness moves in our midst.
Mercy, hope and joy are the gifts of God to each and every one of us.
No longer lost, we have found our way home,
surrounded by God's peace, by God's grace, by God's love.
Thanks be to God, we are forgiven!

©2021 Thom M. Shuman. <http://lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com> May 30.

Scripture Reading John 3:1-17

¹⁻² There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we all know you’re a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren’t in on it.”

³ Jesus said, “You’re absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to—to God’s kingdom.”

⁴ “How can anyone,” said Nicodemus, “be born who has already been born and grown up? You can’t re-enter your mother’s womb and be born again. What are you saying with this ‘born-from-above’ talk?”

⁵⁻⁶ Jesus said, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

⁷⁻⁸ “So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”

⁹ Nicodemus asked, “What do you mean by this? How does this happen?”

¹⁰⁻¹² Jesus said, “You’re a respected teacher of Israel and you don’t know these basics? Listen carefully. I’m speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don’t believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can’t see, the things of God?

¹³⁻¹⁵ “No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person’s failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

[The Message](#) (MSG) Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by [Eugene H. Peterson](#)

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message A faith that takes time and questions

For a very short time when working in a hospital in Toronto as a Spiritual Care provider I was introduced to a woman who was terminally ill. I will call her Mona. Mona was a black woman with a strong sense of herself. She did not believe in God. She was sure that when she died she was going to be put in the ground and that would be the end. It didn't bother her in the least. She wasn't crazy about the way she was dying, but death itself was not a concern for her.

There was something about Mona that pulled me to her. Whenever I was on the night shift I would go to her room as the lights dimmed throughout the hospital and she and I would chat for a time about family, faith, life, and death. She was a joy to be around, but I also knew that our conversations were helpful to her as I brought some distraction and some comfort to her long days, and I learned many lessons from her. We only had a few visits together, but even after many years and many people, I still recall her.

Our conversations were not particularly secret, dangerous, or covert, though sometimes it felt a little covert, but it got me to thinking about conversations and relationships and how different they are depending on who you are talking to. There are times when I am in awe of someone and their life experience and all I want to do is listen and have opportunities to ask questions. I am honoured and a little more than amazed when someone I consider to be wise or important takes the time for me and me alone. Some conversations have had a major impact on my life choices. You may have conversations that come to your mind when you think about how your life has been influenced and impacted.

The story from the scripture in Chapter 3 of the Gospel of John is about a covert, confusing, private and very impactful conversation between Jesus and a man by the name of Nicodemus. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, and it would seem it was because he did not want to be found out by other Jewish leaders of time who were not too pleased about this man Jesus. They regarded Jesus as a problem to be solved, but there was something in Nicodemus's first words to Jesus that point to the fact they also saw something else in Jesus. Nicodemus said, "Rabbi, we all know you're a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it."

Not sure who the "we all" was in that statement, but the group Nicodemus hung around with are other teachers and leaders of the Jewish people so there is probably something there to indicate that the reason Jesus was perceived as a threat was because if he pointed to God then they needed to have some pretty serious conversations about what that meant. Still, no one likes to admit that they may be in error or missed something, and may need to change, especially their point of view. It was and still is easier to think

that we have control over any changes in our lives even when over and over again life proves to us how little we are in control of.

But back to the conversation...Nicodemus has gone to see Jesus. He has ponderings and questions and Jesus has things to teach and share. Problem is Jesus' teachings go way beyond what even a learned person such as Nicodemus can yet understand. Nicodemus recognized that Jesus was someone special who had a deep connection with God, but the things that Jesus was saying were just plain confusing. Jesus talked about a person needing to be born from above and Nicodemus is stuck on the ground thinking. "How can anyone be born who has already been born and grown up? Like really Jesus, one can't re-enter the mother's womb and be born again. What are you talking about?"

Throughout the conversation Jesus shares things that are mind blowing and all Nicodemus has is "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?" and I have no problem admitting that I often have similar, if not the same questions. I come to the scripture as someone who attempts to understand and give listeners some clarity, but it is not as if I never have questions.

Another challenge as we read these words is that we cannot hear Jesus' tone of voice. Where someone might suggest that Jesus was getting a little frustrated, I like to hear Jesus' tone as patience, just like a wise teacher who was being a reassuring presence and a concerned mentor.

Normally I would focus on the content of all that was said in the conversation between the two men, particularly because this passage contains a quotable piece of scripture, you know the one, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (Jn 3:16), but today it is not so much the words that have hooked me as was the suggestion by teacher and pastor David Lose to look at the person of Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is a unique figure in that he is not part of Jesus inner circle, he is not someone who follows him about as he teaches, heals, and preaches in different places and yet he shows up at very particular moments in John's gospel. In this first encounter Nicodemus has a covert, under the cover of night visit where he has many questions and likely walks away with many, many more questions.

He next shows up in defense of Jesus after temple police have been sent out by the Pharisees and chief priests to arrest Jesus. (John 7:45-52) They come back empty handed and the authorities ask them, "Why did you not arrest Jesus?" and they answer, "Never has anyone spoken like this." Meaning Jesus. The chief priests and Pharisees are frustrated by their inability to reign the carpenter's son in and get him to quit doing what he is doing.

They suggest that no authorities have ever believed in Jesus like the crowds, but Nicodemus, who was one of them as a person of authority, stands in defense of Jesus by saying, “Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing? Well, if he doesn’t get blasted for that suggestion. But what that moment disclosed was Nicodemus’ willingness to become more visible, to have courage to stand up and say something, to reveal something about his faith and trust in Jesus in the face of what he knew would be real opposition.

The last time Nicodemus is presented in scripture was after Jesus’ death when he joins and man known as Joseph of Arimathea, and together they respectfully take away Jesus body, with the permission of Pilate, and wrap the body with spices and linen clothes, according to the burial custom of the Jews, and once done, lay Jesus in a tomb. (John 19:38-42)

David Lose sums up Nicodemus in this way, “He is the only side character, as far as I can tell, who shows up at multiple points in John’s Gospel and grows in his faith. At first he brings questions and is confused. He later invites others to slow in their judgment. He finally risks publicly honoring the one just executed. Faith, at least in Nicodemus’ case, takes time. Indeed, his journey with Jesus continues across most of the Gospel of John and, we might assume, beyond.”¹ As Lose says in another place, “the story of Nicodemus offers a picture of a man who is curious about Jesus, who maybe even wants to believe, but struggles.”²

I know this mirrors so many moments in my life as a Christian and it is a pattern that repeats itself at times. Still, I have had enough experience in my faith to trust and learn and be okay with the questions and the mysteries, being grateful for the understanding I have come to have and the questions that have found answers.

Maybe Nicodemus is someone you can relate to, someone who helps you be okay with your struggles in faith and understanding, the stops and starts of coming to belief in Christ as Lord, of the Holy Spirit as God’s power flowing in the world and working in and through us, and God’s amazing love shown in the one who became flesh to be in relationship with us and show us God.

Nicodemus is an example for us as one who questions, learns, finds courage, and sometimes need a little covert conversation to nudge him and us further into understanding and sometime confusion, but yet being able to trust that it is okay. God can work with that and is present for those of us who are able to say we don’t always get

¹ Lose, David. <http://www.davidlose.net/2021/05/trinity-b-the-patron-saint-of-curious-christians/>
Accessed May 26, 2021

² Ibid.

it. We don't need to defend Jesus, but maybe because of our faith we are called on to stand up for others. We don't need to show compassion for Jesus body, but we can extend that compassion to others.

We can question and believe. We can love and struggle. We can be people of faith and share it with others. Unlike Nicodemus have Jesus coming along side us through the Holy Spirit at all times. We are not alone, we are loved, and we are able to trust God's presence in the world even when we have questions. Thanks be to God.

Prayers of the People *(Based on ancient liturgies of the church that mark celebrations of the Trinity)*

Lord, our God,
whose power is beyond compare with glory beyond our understanding;
whose mercy is boundless, and love for us is endless;
look upon us in your compassion.

We pray for peace that calms our hearts and saves our souls,
and for peace in the whole world and throughout creation.

We pray for the stability of the church and the unity of congregations, for all who desire to follow you with faith and reverence, and for the ministries of your church around the world in these challenging times. We pray particularly for the congregation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Thunder Bay on this the 112th anniversary giving thanks for the people who have worshiped and worked together in the past, providing us a legacy of faith and witness. We give thanks for who we are now and how we have been faithful to our work and worship in this time of pandemic, and we pray for our future, knowing that you are going before us, preparing a way for who we are to be.

We pray for our country, our leaders, and all those in public service
for our community, and for all communities, and every nation.
We lift us to you all who offer themselves with diligence and compassion
as months of pandemic stretch on,

We pray for the Indigenous people in Canada. Our hearts are broken at the news of the remains of 215 children being found buried on the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, B.C. We ask forgiveness for the sins of the past and pray for the nurturing of relationships between cultures and communities,
for healing of old hurts and for repentance and reconciliation,
for new and better ways to walk with one another in respect and care,

We pray for the safety of those who must travel by land, sea, and air, for those who long to travel but cannot, and for all those who are separated from those they love.

We pray for the sick, the suffering, and the isolated, for victims of violence, refugees and captives, and for our protection against all affliction, danger, and distress.

To you, Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
belongs all glory, honour and worship,
now and forever, and to the ages of ages.

Hear us now as we pray in the words that Jesus taught us:

Adapted from ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner.
First Sunday after Pentecost- *Trinity Sunday*, May 30, 2021 Year B.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

Trinity Sunday proclaims the outpouring of love within God's own being, for God's very nature is love. There are people from different churches and places following this service. I encourage each of you to present your offering to God this day to your church community. May all our gifts offer an outpouring of our love for God and our willingness to put that love into action in God's world.

©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. First Sunday after Pentecost- *Trinity Sunday*, May 30, 2021 Year B.

If you consider St. Andrew's your church, regardless of where you live, would like to learn more about St. Andrew's, get involved in our ministry and work, or make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian, in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information or to connect with me.

As we prepare to leave this time of worship and be the people of God in the world, we sing a hymn reminds us to always lift our hearts to the Lord...

Hymn *Lift up your hearts/Sing Hallelujah* (vs 1,2,3 & 5) 526

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Lift up your hearts unto the Lord;
lift up your hearts unto the Lord.
Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah;
lift up your hearts unto the Lord! | 2. In Christ the world has been redeemed;
in Christ the world has been redeemed.
Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah,
in Christ the world has been redeemed. |
| 3. His resurrection sets us free;
his resurrection sets us free.
Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah;
his resurrection sets us free. | 5. Sing hallelujah to the Lord!
sing hallelujah to the Lord!
Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah,
sing hallelujah to the Lord! |

Benediction *(based on John 3:16-17)*

Just as God's Word was sent into the world to heal and redeem,
so God sends you into the world this day to be light and love, healing and hope.

Go now to be light for the world!

And may the grace and peace of God the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer
come upon you this day and remain with you always. Amen.

Taken from "O Merciful God: God of Wisdom: Prayers for the Fourth Sunday in Lent," written by Rev. Kathryn Matthews Huey and the Rev. Susan A. Blain. Posted on the United Church of Christ's Worship Ways website.
Reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2012/02/benediction-john-3-16-17.html>.