

**John 3:14-21 (Fourth Sunday in Lent—Series B)**  
**“Light, Truth, Baptism”**  
**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT**  
**March 14, 2021**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Gospel lesson recorded in John 3:

<sup>14</sup>And just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up, <sup>15</sup>in order that whoever believes might in Him have eternal life. <sup>16</sup>For in this way God loved the world, with the result that He gave the Son—the only one—in order that whoever believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. <sup>17</sup>For God did not send the Son into the world in order to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he steadfastly refuses to believe in the Name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the Light, and so their works were evil. <sup>20</sup>For whoever does what is evil hates the Light and does not come to the Light lest his works be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever does the truth comes to the Light so that his works may be manifested, that they are worked in God.

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him’” (John 3:1–2 ESV). Under the cover of darkness, this member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, came to Jesus. He didn’t want his colleagues to know. He had seen the signs that Jesus had been doing in Jerusalem, including the clearing of the temple. For Nicodemus, these were signs that indicated the presence of God.

Our Gospel reading from John 3 are the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. Moments before, Jesus said to this Pharisee, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:3–5 ESV). Jesus concluded His words to Nicodemus, saying, “But

whoever does the truth comes to the Light so that his works may be manifested, that they are worked in God.”

“These were the last words from Rabbi [Jesus] to Nicodemus. And as Nicodemus walked back to his home, he felt their sting. ‘Come into the light? Here I am sneaking around in the dark!’ he whispered to himself as he walked. For all his learning, he was living in darkness and fear. From the time he joined the Sanhedrin, his life was filled with hypocrisy and hiding. He told himself that it was his humility before the wise and experienced on the Sanhedrin. But it was not. He was afraid. Suddenly he felt ashamed. Only by going back to the simple and honest truths he loved as a boy would he ever be able to step out of the shadows and into the light. He knew one thing for certain! He needed to hear the Galilean again. But how?”<sup>1</sup>

This is how our friend in Christ, Pastor Dan Schmelzer, portrayed Nicodemus following the conversation with Jesus in his book, *Stepping into the Light*. Sounds like the best thing to do, doesn't it? Getting out from the long, dark days of Winter into the light-filled days of Spring. Moving away from “the things that go bump in the night” into the bright safety of the daylight. But it's not easy. It can be frightening to get out of the darkness and into the light, especially because the light exposes what takes place under the cover of darkness, in the secrecy of our hearts and minds. Clearly, we are not talking about stepping into the physical light, but into the spiritual Light. So we see the comparison. When the Light shines, it casts light upon that which stands in the darkness and makes it known.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dan Schmelzer, *Stepping into the Light* (Dan Schmelzer, 2018), 112.

Nicodemus didn't want his darkness known. I don't want my darkness known. Do you? The presence of the true Light exposes the sinner for who she or he in fact is. Jesus tells Nicodemus plainly that "people loved the darkness rather than the Light and that's why their works of people are evil." And it is not as if we just do "bad things." We are evil by nature. The popular concept that people are mostly good is complete hogwash. It's not just criminals lurking in the dark streets who are evil. There is more than enough evil in our own sinful hearts. Genesis 8:21, "The intention of man's heart is evil from his youth." Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Is it any wonder, then, that the Scriptures talk about people "walking in darkness"? St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians lays it out simply, "For at one time you were darkness" (Eph. 5:8a ESV). You and I didn't just make mistakes. We didn't simply do this or that wrong while most of the time we were halfway decent. No! At one time, we were darkness itself! We tried to shield our evil deeds, thoughts, words, and desires from the light of God's Word. We didn't want our spiritual laziness, our hateful social media posts, the lust in our heart that led us to cheat on a spouse to be exposed. Our lies caused such hurt. Our words destroyed relationships. We enjoyed our pet sins as we found that they gave us the pleasure we desired. We were walking in darkness because we were darkness. And the Light is simply too much of a threat to the will and way of the sinner. By nature we hate the Light and, if left up to us, would choose to remain in the darkness of our sin. We don't want to come into the Light and have our sins exposed to other people or God Himself.

Not pleasant to hear, is it? God's Law never is easy on the ears or on the heart and conscience. When the Light of the truth shines on us, we experience terror in the heart. We are the sinful people we pretend so hard that we are not. We are the corrupted people that

we work so hard to hide from each other. The sinful, corrupted “me” is not the person I want you to see. But God sees it, sees it all. Dear God! He knows all of my darkness, all of my sins, all of my lust, all of my pride and selfishness. In terror, all we can experience is the dark night of divine judgment. You and I will face death for all of this if the wrath of God remains upon us.

“And just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up, in order that whoever believes might in Him have eternal life. For in this way God loved the world, with the result that He gave the Son—the only one—in order that whoever believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world in order to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.”

God the Father placed in the midst of this world of sinful people the perfect and ultimate fact of His fatherly love in the crucifixion of His only Son, Jesus. God loved the world in this way; He loved you this way: He lifted up the Son of Man on a cross so that whoever believes in Him might have eternal life and not eternal death. The Son given into death is the object of faith upon whom you look with trust in the heart and not perish because of your sinful darkness. “Just as God commanded the lifting up of the bronze snake so that whoever would look at it would not die but live, so God gave his Son into death so that whoever believes in him (that is, the Crucified) would not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>2</sup>

And so it is that the Son of God, instead of coming in great glory and power to punish, condemn, and destroy sinners, was given to you to be lifted up on a cross, to suffer and die

---

<sup>2</sup> William C. Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 409.

on that accursed tree, bearing your sins and shedding His atoning blood for your forgiveness. Jesus came from His heavenly throne as the divine Son of Man so that you might have abundant, real life by His bringing you into the Light of salvation from sin and death. The Lord promised through the prophet Isaiah, “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone” (Is. 9:2 ESV). Notice it’s past tense, the people who “walked” and “dwelt” in darkness—but no more! And again, Paul in Ephesians 5:8, the whole verse, “For at one time you **were** darkness,” but not anymore, “now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8 ESV).

“[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13 ESV). You and I have come to the Light of Christ Jesus. Our sins stand forgiven. Where there is the forgiveness of sins there is also eternal life and salvation. As a result of this new life of faith in the Crucified and Risen Christ, we now “do the truth.” What exactly does that mean? “‘To do the truth’ is to conform [your] life to the truth. Jesus [Himself] is ‘the Truth.’ So, to do the truth is to receive Christ . . . as the reality of [your] life, in whom [you live] and according to whom [you] live. This . . . [receiving Christ by faith] occurs in the event of [being born again] from above through water and the Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> And you know what that is—Baptism!

And that’s exactly where Jesus began with Nicodemus, to bring him into the Light of God’s grace in His only Son. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” “To be bathed in the font

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 412.

of Spiritual regeneration is to look upon the Spiritual snake of the Crucified and so to be healed from the venomous bite of sin, to be freed from death, and to receive eternal life."<sup>4</sup> And this is now your life lived by faith in Christ as His Baptized children. You have received healing from the poison of sin through the forgiveness won for you by Jesus on the cross. You are rescued from the power of death and the devil. Eternal life is yours. The apostle Peter assures us that as the Baptized people of God in Christ, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9 ESV).

In Baptism, "you have received Christ who is the Light of the world. Live always in the light of Christ, and be ever watchful for His coming, that you may meet Him with joy and enter with Him into the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which shall have no end."<sup>5</sup> Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 408.

<sup>5</sup> From "Holy Baptism," Presentation of the Baptismal Candle, *Lutheran Service Book*, page 271.