

“Spread the Good News: Stop ‘Being God’”

John 3:1-16

How do you normally see yourself? What are some of your thought patterns? How do you see yourself at this moment? Take a deep breath and close your eyes and look at yourself. Let whatever comes to you emerge without judgment but just with awareness. Now take another deep breath and try to see yourself as God sees you. If you are having a hard time accessing that perspective, try to see yourself through the eyes of someone who loves you unconditionally, this could be a pet, a friend, a partner, a child, or a parent. What if you saw yourself through the eyes of someone who is critical of you or has judged you in the past? What about seeing yourself in comparison to others you admire or envy? Was there a difference in how you saw yourself? What does the difference tell you about the essence of who you are? What if we tried to see others that way?

New York Times columnist, David Brooks, had a transformative experience when he was able to see people and himself as souls walking around. For most of his life, he believed that life was material success and becoming a good person. It was not until his marriage failed and he came face to face with his inner emptiness that he realized that his life was about something deeper. Here is a video clip about his spiritual transformation of understanding life: <https://youtu.be/nkpY8YZMpx0>.

The character we meet in today’s Bible story represents this kind of search for a deeper truth about oneself. Nicodemus who was a teacher himself came to Jesus by night to seek special wisdom. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. He was a highly educated man who dedicated his life’s work to study and knowledge. Yet, in the Gospel of John, Nicodemus is presented as coming to Jesus at night because he represented the group which did not understand Jesus; the religious leaders of Israel who felt threatened by his message of reform, justice, and love. Nicodemus was part of “the world” which the Gospel of John had previously described as “darkness.” He was a part of the dominating hierarchy of Israel that had made itself powerful at the expense of the peasants. Nicodemus had witnessed Jesus’ prophetic act of the cleansing of the temple and wanted to learn more about him. He went to talk to him at night.

Nicodemus was struggling to understand the message of Jesus because it may have seemed too radical to him. He wanted to know how he could earn or find his way to the heart of God. He wanted to be good. That is what he was taught. But Jesus took the opportunity to challenge the mindset of needing to be good as if it is something we are not already. Let’s listen to the story from John 3:1-16

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus

answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶“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.

Jesus invited Nicodemus to go back to that original blessing! It is about being intentional to remember our birthright blessing, our souls. We come from God and God is at the heart of who we are. We may stray from that reality and live as if we are not already loved, but that deep love is always there for us and is as close to us as each breath we take.

Jesus invited Nicodemus to be birthed in and through this mystery of divine grace. He did not tell him what the Holy Spirit was all about or how it worked. Instead, he called him to an experience of the Spirit. Jesus knew that what Nicodemus needed was not another piece of information about the faith or something that he needed to earn or accomplish. He already knew all the scriptures. What was missing for him is a deep awareness of the love of God in his being.

In her book *Anatomy of the Spirit*, Caroline Myss invites us to see the sacrament of Baptism as a welcoming of the person’s soul into this world. This image has helped me to see Baptism in a new light. Sometimes Christians think of baptism as a mandatory step to be accepted by God, but in its essence, Baptism is about the recognition and blessing of soul of the child or adult.

What helps you to recognize the blessing of your eternal soul and your connection to God? What help you to remember each day that you are loved and good because God already loves you?

This is such good news that we should shout out from the roof tops! The dominant illusion that is all around us is that we are not good enough and that we have to try to be good because left to our own devices, we are either bad or just not quite loveable. Often times we are timid in our witness to the goodness of God’s creation because we have confused this good news with trying to convert people to one religion or another. But if we remember that this is about seeing God in ourselves and in others, everything changes, and every encounter becomes sacred. It is about accepting the divine grace in all of its

manifestations and diversity. This good news of God's love is sorely needed in the world. We need to spread it through our embrace of the sacred in the people we encounter.

I will end with the words from Desmond and Mpho Tutu in their book, *Made for Goodness*. This is from the chapter: Stop "Being Good," in which they write, "Living our goodness is our way of testifying that we know ourselves to be perfectly loved by God....most of us grasp this truth only intellectually. Some of us are plagued by guilt and shame. Some of us tie ourselves in tortured knots in the dogged quest for a flawlessly perfect life. God invites us to set aside the guilt, the shame, and the anxious question. We are invited to a different way of life." The following words are an invitation to turn to listen to God speak the voice of the heart:

Don't struggle and strive so, my child.
There is no race to complete, no point to prove,
no obstacle course to conquer for you to win my love.

I have already given it to you.
I loved you before creation drew its first breath.
I dreamed you as I molded Adam from the mud.
I saw you wet from the womb.
And I loved you then.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.
Stop racing ahead at your own pace,
you will only be exhausted, flamed out, and
spent before the task is accomplished.
Pace yourself with me, walk alongside me.

Do you think I don't know the demands of your life?
I see you striving for perfection, craving my acceptance.
I see you bending yourself out of shape to conform to
the image that you have of me.
Do you imagine that I did not know who you were when
I made you, when I knit you together in your mother's womb?
Do you think I planted a fig tree and expected roses to bloom?
No, child, I sowed what I wanted to reap.

You are a child after my own heart.
Seek out your deepest joy and you will find me there.
Find that which makes you most perfectly yourself and
know that I am at the heart of it.
Do what delights you
And you will be working with me,
Walking with me,
Finding your life

Hidden in me.

Ask me any question
My answer is love.
When you want to hear my voice,
Listen for love.
How can you delight me?
I will tell you:
Love.
The tough, unbreakable, unshakable love.
Are you looking for me?
You will find me in love.
Would you know my secrets?
There is only one:
Love.

Do you want to know me?
Do you yearn to follow me?
Do you want to reach me?
Seek and serve love. Amen