

# Sermon

## “Wind”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, May 30, 2021

Trinity Sunday

### **Prayer for Illumination:**

**Lord God, we gather today with the storm of Pentecost still fresh in our minds. We remember well the sound of your rushing wind, come to claim us, and inspire us to live newly into your kingdom.**

**We worry that we are a people of unclean lips and that we have no business presuming to gather before you in all of your holiness . . . and yet, we know that you are gracious and merciful too.**

**So, we gather before you, perhaps a bit like nervous Nicodemus — perhaps like timid Isaiah — and we wait to receive a word for us to deliver to the hurting world.**

**So speak this day, Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we might move out of our nervous timidity and into bold acts of mercy and grace. Utter again your astonishing invitation for us to join you in this ministry to a hurting world. Ask, “Who will go for us?” and inspire our discipleship that we might become people “born of the Spirit,” and say, “Here I am! Send me!”  
In the name of the Father & of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

*Is. 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2 Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 And one called to another and said:*

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

*4 The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”*

*Is. 6:6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: “Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”*

*John 3:1 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. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ 8 The 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.” 9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”*

## **I. I wonder what you think of Nicodemus?**

- A. A man of power and influence**
  - 1. Pharisee**
  - 2. Member of the Sanhedrin (Council in the city)**
- B. Who in chapter 7 will argue with the other members of the Sanhedrin that Jesus should not be arrested because he has not had a fair hearing.**
- C. Who will show up after the crucifixion in chapter 19 with spices to prepare Jesus' body for a proper burial.**
- D. What are we to make of this man who has a lot to lose by associating with the “riff-raff” that was Jesus?**
  - 1. But who is curious and who comes to see him at night.**
- E. Calvin calls him a “secret disciple” who believes in private but does not make public his discipleship.**
- F. Soren Kierkegaard calls him “an admirer.”**
- G. Are we brave enough and honest enough to say he is *a lot like us*?**
  - 1. He seems to want to trust Jesus and the gospel**
    - a. i.e — He is beautiful and important because he is loved by God**
  - 2. But he is entangled in a world that defines him differently**
    - a. Admired and important because he is powerful & well-positioned.**

**II. It is true that Nicodemus does not provide us a perfect discipleship to emulate.**

**A. But then again . . . none of the other disciples do**

**either!**

- 1. Judas betrays**
- 2. Peter denies**
- 3. Thomas doubts**
- 4. *All* the disciples appear to flee in fear at the time of the trial and in the aftermath of the crucifixion**

**B. Set next to the 12 — Nicodemus doesn't look so bad.**

**C. And where would the world be if Nicodemus had not gone to Jesus secretly at night to give voice to his faith and also to ask his nagging questions.**

- 1. We might not have ever gotten the reply from Jesus about being born from above and how *God so loves the world.***

**III. But perhaps I am ahead of myself. Let's look at the text**

**A. Nicodemus comes to tell Jesus that, in his view, there is reason for the Sanhedrin to validate him as a true teacher:**

“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.”

**B. Jesus, feeling no need for the Sanhedrin's validation, tells Nicodemus that no one will understand him or see the kingdom of which he speaks without being born from above.**

**C. Nicodemus, responds from what he knows: you cannot be born a second time.**

“How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?”

- 1. We begin to suspect that Nicodemus' theology**

**is stuck in Piaget’s “concrete operational” phase of development.**

**D. Jesus responds by explaining that the birth of which he speaks is a birth by the Spirit**

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ 8 The 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.”

**IV. That is at the center of what church is about**

**A. Providing a place where all of us can transition**

- 1. From *secret disciples* to *public disciples***
- 2. From *admirers of Jesus* to *followers of Jesus***

**B. In short, the church is a kind of birthing center**

- 1. Because it is a miracle every time a birth happens**
- 2. Because when we are newly born we need a lot of support and encouragement as we grow**
- 3. Because though we start off with the food of infancy — we know we need to grow into adults with adult appetites and pallets.**

1Cor. 3:1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food.

**C. The church is a place to become attuned to the Spirit.**

- 1. To become the sort of person who is sensitive**

**to the movement of God's Spirit and the still, small, subtle voice of God which seeks to guide you.**

- D. Hopefully that is happening in everything offered at Cary Presbyterian Church**
- 1. From Youth group**
  - 2. VBS/Children's ministry**
  - 3. To mission opportunities (ASP, Esperanza, Dorcas)**
  - 4. The music ministry**
  - 5. SS**
  - 6. *The Pilgrimage***

*Mission Statement for The Pilgrimage*

For Christians hearing the call to go deeper —  
*The Pilgrimage* creates a community and provides tools and experiences through which we learn to hear the call of God and respond in faith, journeying together with friends on the path to a Spirit-led and joyful life.

**Be sure to join us for the Christian Prayer Toolbox starting Saturday!**

- V. It is easy and a bit boring, if I'm honest, to have the kind of faith Nicodemus has in John chapter 3.**
- A. Where we think that everything God might do must fit into what we think we already know.**
  - B. Where we are not tuned into the movement of the**

**Spirit because we don't imagine that God has anything new to say.**

**C. Where our faith has become essentially another part of how we fit in and earn recognition**

**VI. But what we see happen to Nicodemus in the wake of this conversation with Jesus is that he breaks out of his old and ordinary faith and begins to live into a new and bold kind of discipleship.**

**A. Defending Jesus in chapter 7**

**B. Providing for his preparation for burial in 19**

**C. So I invite us all to be on the lookout for the Spirit**

**1. To be ready for those moments when a new life a new discipleship is born in us from above.**

**D. But to respond to this calling will require that we listen.**

**1. Jesus said just that when he spoke to Nicodemus:**

*The 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."*

**2. In recent years a literary guide for me has been brother Carlo Carretto. In the preface to his book "Letter from the Desert" he writes:**

*God's call is mysterious; it comes in the darkness of faith. It is so fine, so subtle, that it is only with the deepest silence within us that we can hear it. And yet nothing is so decisive and overpowering for a man on this earth, nothing surer or stronger. This call is uninterrupted: God is always calling us! But there are distinctive moments in this call of his, moments which leave a permanent mark on us --moments which we*

*never forget.”*

preface xv Letters from the Desert Carlo Carretto

† **YouTube Fail-blog “Ooooooh! *That’s gonna leave a mark!*”**

**All humor aside, though, it is sorta like that with being born from above. The love of God is so strong and real and powerful that it leaves its mark.**

**When we pay attention we can be aware of these moments where God is trying to profoundly reach us and shape us.**

† **MHS - self-deprecation and then the day-dream/vision.**

**It is a moment where the wind of God’s Spirit addressed me in all my partial discipleship and reminded me that above everything else — what matters is that God was glad to have me home again.**