

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Last Sunday after church I went over to Swan Point to "bless the fleet," which got me to thinking about sailboats, motorboats, and kayaks. I love to kayak, which means I get places on my own steam.

Winds and currents affect how fast I travel, but it's basically up to me. Motor boats allow you to control where you go and how fast; you can override adverse conditions; you have power; you can also be lazy. Sailboats move on wind power, skillfully harnessed by the sailor. But if there's no wind, they're not going anywhere.

When you think about your approach to life, and to your spiritual life, which are you? Trying to get where you're going on your own steam? Seeking the most power and speed? Or floating on the Life of God, harnessing the power of the Spirit to move you where God wants you to be?

I think Nicodemus wanted to be a motor boat. He wanted to be able to control when he went, where he went, how fast he went. Sailing leaves too much to chance. Nicodemus was a theologian – a scholar of the law, a Pharisee, a righteous man. He saw in Jesus evidence of God, but not in a way that his study led him to expect. So he went to find out more. He went out to explore God. Whether he came at night because he didn't want to be seen, or he wanted to have a chance at real conversation with Jesus, or because he's "in the dark," who knows. He investigated. That's what people who are curious about God do.

He doesn't come out and say his real question, "Who the heck are you?" He is more indirect, "We know you come from God – look at your miracles." There is a big unspoken "but" in his question – "how can you be the Messiah?" And Jesus answers in an indirect way.

"You can't see who I am if you haven't been born from above."
Nicodemus answers on the literal plane.
"How can one be born a second time? Especially if you're old, like me?"
Jesus goes deeper; "You can't perceive the Life of God unless you're born by water and the Spirit. Flesh can only give birth to flesh; you need spirit to perceive Spirit."

Another way of saying that is, “If you want to see God, recognize God, live in the life of God, you need to be reborn in the Holy Spirit so you get spiritual vision. These are two different realms we live in – and one set of faculties will only allow us to perceive in one realm. We need the spiritual faculty to perceive the other. We can’t think our way into understanding God-Life – we have to experience it.”

Today is the one Sunday in the church year devoted to a theological concept – that the One God we worship exists in three persons.

Not three parts – three different and distinct entities that make up one God.

We can’t think our way into comprehending that mystery either – we have to experience God as Three.

How do we develop these spiritual senses so we can perceive the life of God?

I once read a book called *Time and Again*, by Jack Finney. It told of a military experiment into time travel. The premise of the experiment was that time is not consecutive, but all times are running simultaneously – and what keeps us bound in the time in which we live is all the sensory data our minds perceive. So the experiment was to get the subject back to 1882 New York City – they put him up in an apartment in the Dakota, a building that existed then, that had views of Central Park like there would have been in 1882, but no modern traffic. All the furnishings and his clothing was period, and his food and other things were delivered each day by people dressed for 1882; each day he got that day’s newspaper and magazines for 1882. The idea was that if he could get untethered him from the 20th century, and grounded in 1882, he’d be there. For weeks, nothing changes – until one night he goes out on his balcony and looking up Central Park West, sees the Museum of Natural History. And after a moment he realizes that in 1970, he wouldn’t be able to see it – there are buildings in the between. But not in 1882 – that’s when he realizes it has happened, and off he goes into 1882 New York and many adventures.

What does this have to do with faith? Our physical senses and all the “stuff” of our lives tether us so much to this world that we have trouble perceiving the spiritual realm which is right here along with this one.

That was Jesus’ message, over and over –

“Look! The Kingdom of God, what I like to call the “energy field of God” – it’s right here. Draw on its power and you can heal and forgive and overcome.” Something amazing happens when that God-Reality breaks through and we perceive it.

When we really allow the Holy Spirit to direct our prayers, there is power. There are gifts: supernatural abilities to know things – what we often call “instinct,” but is one way the Spirit can guide us if we’re open to it; gifts to heal, to bring peace.

There are qualities – peace, love, joy, patience, endurance – that allow us to live the Life of God in such a way that others are drawn to it too.

All this is our inheritance as followers of Christ, united with Jesus in baptism, alive for ever in the love of the Father, filled with the Spirit.

All the wealth of God’s power and love available to us right here, right now, at any moment we invoke the Spirit of God.

God in three persons – three times the love, three times the way to connect.

Ryan and Ryann and Jackson – as you graduate and move toward college and a boatload of big transitions, I pray you will know this in your guts. That wherever you go, however far from home, however far from the person you have been up to now, you cannot get beyond the range of God’s love. It is the ocean in which you sail – or paddle, or zip along.

You can fail to check in with God, not go to church, stop formally praying – and that Holy Spirit will be with you anyway, quietly, not bugging you unless you invite him in.

That Spirit will bring the presence of Jesus to you anytime you feel in danger or alone.

That Spirit will bring the love of the Father to you, a love that forgives all, and wants to see you grow into the fullness of who God made you to be.

God is always here – and the more we learn to untether our senses from the physical world, the freer we are to experience the deeper reality of God. So any time you have a God-moment, notice it. Give thanks for it.

If you sense God calling you to do something, be like Isaiah in that temple and say, “Here I am, send me.”

God is always here – and the more we learn to untether our senses from the physical world, the freer we are to experience the deeper reality of God.

It is harder to be a sailboat than a motor boat – but much richer in the faith-life, learning to trust that God is moving in, around and through us as we say “yes.”

Amen

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 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." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 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?"

Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 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." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? "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. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"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.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Isaiah 6:1-8

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. 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. And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. 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!"

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 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." 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!"