

## **The Wind Blows Where It Will (Scout Sunday)**

**John 3:1-9**

*Ute Molitor, First Congregational Church, UCC, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

Nature is so smart! I loved listening to Ed's talk about how Redwood Trees help each other and what they can teach us. There have always been people in the Christian church (Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Bonaventure, Francis of Assisi and many others) who liked to think of creation as the first Bible to teach us about God even without words. Creation can teach us so much about God connects everything together in a balanced way! I would like to expand on that some more in response to the reading from what one might call the second Bible. That is the collection of writings we have that shares how people have experienced and grappled with God over the centuries. It is a story that always continued to develop.

Let me talk about the story from the Gospel (or "good news") of John a little. In the story, Jesus uses language of being born again to express how we have to find a way to start over and learn to see each other and our whole planet and universe with God's eyes. Jesus wasn't actually talking about a child being born like each of us were with mom's help though celebrating that birth is also important! Thanks, moms for all your efforts in giving us birth and raising us.

Let's look at the story of Nicodemus who came to talk with Jesus. Nicodemus was a smart older man and a Pharisee. Pharisees were men who had studied all the laws and teachings of God for his people. He was trying very hard to treat people justly, to keep himself healthy, to worship God, and to do what he thought would be pleasing to God. He would have appreciated all your Scouting laws values. I know the boy scouts talk a lot about the values of being trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. You pledge to be physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight. The girl scouts use the language of empowerment, compassion, courage, confidence, character, leadership, entrepreneurship, and active citizenship. And both groups say all that with people and with the environment in mind. These are all good and important.

Now, Nicodemus had heard about Jesus and how he taught and healed people. What was a bit strange for Nicodemus' group (or "troop") of Pharisees was that Jesus was particularly loving to people who had been pushed aside, bullied, mistreated, overlooked or disadvantaged. Jesus even loved people who didn't practice the religion of Nicodemus and those who did something that wasn't right. Some of Nicodemus' peers felt like Jesus shouldn't do that. They felt that Jesus was making himself 'unclean' by being with people who were not living 'right'. Being unclean was a big deal back then. They weren't just talking about having to take a bath because you got muddied on a camping trip. It was more like talking about your whole being, your life and character being messed up. They began to oppose Jesus for loving people who seemed unlovable for that reason. They were struggling to be compassionate, empowering, inclusive and encouraging toward everybody, we might say, even though they felt they were doing the "right" thing. I think we are all still learning about that.

Nicodemus was still interested in Jesus but he was probably also a bit nervous to be seen with Jesus in the day time. Maybe his peers would not approve. So, he went to Jesus at night. Nicodemus said some kind words to Jesus about how he appreciated what Jesus had to say. Then Jesus told him: "Very truly, no one can see the kingdom (or reign/world) of God without being born from above." Jesus had been talking to people about this kingdom or reign of God a lot. He wanted to imagine a kind of world community where people, creatures and the earth all belonged to each other, worked together, and were being treated fairly and compassionately. There would be so much love, thanks to God, that everyone would have a place to belong and everyone would have enough. Jesus often used an example from nature like birds or flowers to explain what he meant.

Nicodemus was trying to be open to what Jesus had to say but couldn't make sense of the idea that he would need to be born again "from above". He asked Jesus: "How can anyone be born after growing old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb (belly) and be born?" Jesus was not talking about going back into mom's womb (a word related to "compassion") – I think moms here will appreciate that. Nor was Jesus simply talking about living in some distant heaven "above". Jesus was saying that we need to

learn to live on earth in a new way. He talked about living like we are starting over again. It's like starting your computer or I-Pad again if something has gotten stuck and you need to start over but this time everything works much better with needed up-dates or even a new operating system! Jesus was talking about coming to see the world the way God sees it and loves it and participates in it.

Yes, for Jesus, God was always a part of this world, giving life to everything, connecting everything and everybody. How we treat anybody or anything is how we treat God! Jesus was always saying that we are stronger when we work together and give each other comfort and strength. It is the Spirit of God in all of us that can make that happen. There was a wise man named Meister (which means: great teacher) Eckhart who lived hundreds of years ago. Here is how he described what might be meant by this birth: *What is the test that you have indeed undergone this holy birth? Listen carefully. If this birth has truly taken place within you, then every single creature points you toward God.*

I think Meister Eckhart was saying that everything in creation can teach us how are all connected and belong together. Remember how Ed was just telling us about how the trees work together like a community. Everything God has made is good. We get in trouble when we start making our own wants and needs more important than anyone's. I think that this kind of selfish way of living is what Jesus means by living in the *flesh* (ego driven). Jesus said that God gives us the Holy Spirit to help us be connected with God in and around us all the time, if we only pay attention.

And Jesus also said that we cannot control this Spirit. It is like the wind. Jesus says: "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 (John 3:8)." Jesus is again talking about wind in more than the usual way just like he talked about being born in different ways. We all know how much the real wind can blow through the trees. The trees renew the air so we and everything that lives can breathe well. The wind makes sure that the air keeps moving all around and refreshes us. We also know that we can use the wind to create energy with windmills.

That is one important way to help our environment because it means having more and more ways to create energy that don't pollute the air all around. Did you know that Acadia National Park is now the second most polluted National Park in the country because polluted air from our neighboring states further south is coming all the way to us?<sup>1</sup> That is also a reminder that we need to come together in our country and the world to address these challenges that are tied to our own demands and habits for more and more energy and things.

Jesus is also talking about the wind as a way to describe the Spirit of love, compassion and connection that is so important for us to be able to live together. We need that love every day just like we need the actual air to breathe and stay alive. The Spirit and energy of God is alive everywhere and often in ways that we do not expect. We cannot control it. That is a good thing! The Spirit of God is in every one of us no matter how young or old we are. It is blowing in Daisies, Brownies, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, Webelos, Boy Scouts and all the rest of us who are here today as well. That is so exciting and should give us hope and confidence for our lives and for our planet/environment.

Since it is International Women's Day today, I would just like to take a moment to share a little bit about the exciting ways that the Girl Scouts are making a difference in taking care of the earth and all the creatures in it. The "It's Your Planet – Love It!" series has learning opportunities for girls of all ages. You can learn about preserving water quality and the health of the oceans. There are science and engineering programs to address air-quality and learn about the power of creating energy through windfarms. Girls learn about healthy food production that is good for all creatures and for the soil and water. Girl Scouts even learn how environmental injustices are affecting people who are less well off, how some people go hungry needlessly or lose their homes because of climate

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<sup>1</sup> Given such pollution, I was struck by how one of the women teachers of the church already said in the 13<sup>th</sup> century: *Now in the people that were meant to be green there is no more life of any kind. There is only shriveled barrenness. The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil, selfish goings-on. Thunderstorms menace. The air belches out the filthy uncleanness of the peoples. The earth should not be injured! The earth must not be destroyed.* Hildegard of Bingen (13<sup>th</sup> ct)

change. That is amazing and forward looking. We need those INSPIRED (filled with the spirit] and energetic young leaders in our midst.

I learned about how some daisies, brownies, and juniors in Massachusetts partnered with organizations including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to clean up the Cape Cod canal. As part of their “Forever Green Project,” they also built a so called “rain garden” to protect the herring run from runoff water from the roads. Since everything is interconnected they also helped many other animals who depend on the herring to survive. We all have our part to play in learning to be born again in the sense of seeing and living from a much more interconnected place and consciousness.

Today, let’s give thanks for the ways the Holy Spirit/Wind blows where it will. It is present and active in our young people as they learn to care for the planet. May their effort also inspire the rest of us to grow in love and action. Amen.