

2021-05-30 ... 10.30am FTW Trinity Sermon ... Mrs Jane Rylands

John 3: 1-17; Romans 8: 12 – 17

One of the things John and Paul are writing about in these passages is how the Holy Spirit brings us into a relationship with God and Jesus, a relationship so close that it is actually family.

John tells us about Nicodemus. With so few words to describe what must have been quite a conversation, it's possible to come up with a range of interpretations about it. This is my take:

**Nicodemus** we are told is a leader of the Jews. He comes at night which possibly just means he has had a full day but I think is intended to imply that he wants the visit to have an amount of secrecy or, at the very least, privacy about it – he has a big question and he wants to resolve it fully without giving rise to gossip before he's ready to deal with it. And he says **We** know that you have come from God. So it would appear that he has come as a representative of other rabbis as well.

I think that their question is, they can see that Jesus is God-sent but how are they supposed to incorporate him into their religion – they are Jews, because their mothers were Jews, how can they be something else?

Jesus' answer is that they are what they are by birth, by circumstance, but the Spirit will open God to anyone and anyone to God.

I think it is likely that everyone here has had some experience of the Spirit. Perhaps you are lucky enough to have never known a time when you didn't consider yourself to be part of God's family, but others will know a time when the Spirit swept them off their feet with a resulting passionate love for God, and others will have felt a gentle poke that they couldn't ignore and have come to find answers to questions about Jesus that have never troubled them until now.

There is something very frustrating to us earthbound beings about the movement of the Spirit and Jesus touches on it here. He talks of the Spirit as a wind, that you don't know where they come from or where they're going. Nicodemus and his colleagues already seem to be more than half way there, they already recognise that Jesus has come as a teacher from God even though he presumably hasn't gone all the way through their system and passed their selection processes. Why have they not been given the knowledge that comes from above?

John doesn't follow up on this exactly but in Chapter 19 we hear that Nicodemus joins with Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body for burial bringing with him a royal portion of spices, so I feel sure that he for one did at some point find his faith in God redescribed by his encounters with Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We will have possibly felt a similar frustration when we have prayed longingly for someone to know that Jesus loves them. Sometimes we are praying against a barrier like the one that Nicodemus seems to have set up ... I'm ... from the wrong background, not good enough, can't change the colour of my spots - how can Jesus be for me?

Jesus answers that by saying: **'Look at me, I speak of what I know'**. In our own way we can only do the same, we must tell our story as a child of God, tell of how it began for us, and how it's going, the downs as well as the ups and keep praying that the Holy Spirit will be felt as they blow by.

We have heard two reasons this morning why it is worth persevering in prayer for those who have not yet felt the breath of God fall upon them. John gives one – Jesus was sent not to judge **PTO**

but to save. He really is good news. And Paul gives another – the Spirit releases us from being fearful of what is to come because we are children of God and our Father will look after us.

Paul's plea is that we should let ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit because by letting the Spirit help us to step away from the sinful things we are drawn to do we will have true life as children of God, co-heirs even with Jesus.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is less elusive in this situation when their help is sought. I came across a quote this week from an American artist called Brice Marden. He was speaking about how hard it is to start a drawing, to make that first mark on the white canvas. After you get going, he says, it's a collaboration. He was talking about how once you have one mark on that blank page then the next is made in relation to that one and so on, the decisions are not as big or as scary because they are not taken alone.

I think that also applies to our relationship with God. It's that first step that can seem too hard or too ridiculous to take. But once we have put our hand into the outstretched waiting hand of God everything after that is done in collaboration, or if you will, in prayer. The journey will, Paul tells us, not always be easy, there will be suffering even, but it will be with Jesus, with God, with the Holy Spirit and will not end in death but in eternal life and whatever we think that might be we can surely say that it is good!

In the name of God the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

Amen