

## **Born Again**

Matters of Faith: Part 1 “Born Again”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – October 25th, 2020

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**Readings:** Joel 2:28-32; 1 Peter 1:22-2:3; John 3:1-16

**Reflection:** Psalm 100

**Greeting:** Trust in the Lord and do good. May the Lord give strength to the people! O taste and see that the Lord is good! God is our refuge and strength. Praise the Lord!

**Prayer:** O Lord our God, you are always more ready to bestow your good gifts on us than we are to seek them, and are willing to give more than we desire or deserve. Help us so to seek that we may truly find, so to ask that we may joyfully receive, so to knock that the door of your mercy may be opened to us; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 100

*A Psalm of thanksgiving. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 100 and hear of giving thanks. Thanks for creation. Thanks for being able to call ourselves God’s people. That we are cared for. Thankful for God’s goodness and love. What are you thankful for? How do you praise God for those things? How do you share that praise with others? How do you experience God’s love in your life?

**Prayer:** God, our faithful guardian. We seek your love to fill our hearts. We depend on you to grant us the grace we need to live a new life in Christ our Savior. Help us to always be thankful for the many blessings that you have given us. Grant us the faith we need to continue to follow you. May your steadfast love and generous mercy be with us always and everywhere. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Joel chapter 2, verses 28 through 32.

*Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.*

*(Joel 2:28-32 NRSV\*)*

Our next reading is from First Peter chapter 1, verse 22 through chapter 2, verse 3.

*Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever." That word is the good news that was announced to you. Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

*(1 Peter 1:22-2:3 NRSV\*)*

Our final reading is from John, chapter 3, verses 1 through 16.

*Now 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.”*  
 (John 3:1-16 NRSV\*)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We begin a new series this week about Matters of Faith. Our first message is about being born again. And it's a phrase that has gotten a lot of attention over the years and even has become a marker for some, and almost a catchphrase. And the meaning gets washed out and the understanding starts to falter. So, in our readings for today I chose to highlight some of this idea of what that really means. That when read about it in the Gospel of John, we get Jesus having a conversation with Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews at that time, a religious authority well versed in Scripture. So, I can imagine this would have been a very deep theological conversation. Nicodemus even compliments Jesus, recognizing that he is a teacher who has come from God. And Jesus says to him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” And this causes some confusion, seemingly taken very literally by Nicodemus. Because the question is, how can someone be born again, unless you're somehow going to find a way to come out of the womb? And Jesus says to him, that what's flesh is flesh and what's spirit is spirit. It's interesting, because when we think about that, it is a very tricky concept. It's a very symbolic thing. And then when they talk about it, Jesus tells him that if you don't believe what I'm telling you about earthly things, how do you ever expect to believe heavenly things? He fully expects Nicodemus to understand what he's saying. And part of it's that he's not talking about a new concept of having God's Spirit poured out, the Holy Spirit giving the people a new life.

We hear about that in part from Joel. Joel talks about God pouring out his Spirit on all flesh. That all people receive the Spirit, that they'll be able to prophesy and dream dreams and have visions. That they will have God's message in them. “Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Those who are filled with the Spirit, moved by God, would be given new life. And we can't take it so literally that we lose track of what it is saying. We're not going to exit the womb again, all fresh and clean and innocent. But it's that concept. We may not be exiting the womb, but we can be made into that image again, stripped clean of those things that cause us to stumble. And we hear that and, First Peter. That when he talks about the people who are obedient to the truth, that love one another deeply, that they are born anew not of the flesh, but of the Spirit. But to do it you must “Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Seek God, know what is good, and take that in your new life. That if you have known that feeling of being born anew in Christ, then you understand.

And I come back to John at this point. Because we come back to that very famous line, “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.” A new life that we are born into. And it's interesting to me, there's a lot of various things that we could get into and a lot of minute details that we could trudge into, but I wanted to look at this concept of having the faith that we can be born anew in Christ. Because I think it's an important one that we sometimes think of almost too simply. Sometimes we get into our heads that being born again is just that act of saying, “Oh, I follow Christ. I'm a born again, Christian, I'm saved.” And everything Scripture tells us that's not it. It's not about a magic phrase that saves us. Honestly, even saying “born again Christian” can feel like a redundant statement because it is really saying “I'm a Christian Christ follower” because to truly accept Christ you must be born again. As our readings for today, and many other scriptural verses will point out, it's the things that you do. It's how you live your life. Not that once saved, that that's it that you go, “Oh, I follow Christ. I'm good.” Because honestly, that creates sort of a lazy theology. Because to that, you're not saying you're born anew, you're just claiming a title. And that's not good enough. I could declare myself emperor of the United States. But does that make it so? No.

But it is a faith matter. Because it means that we put our trust in Christ to wash us clean, to give us new life, to give us eternal life. And that we claim it by doing his work. That we claim it by reflecting that love. That God gave the world his Son so that we would know that we were loved. And know how to love, how to care, how to show others, that we would give up the things that caused us to need that redemption in the first place. Not that we would suddenly have this one thing, that's the only thing we'll ever need, that we would have a guide to show us how to do it. That we would have the help we need to be able to live a new life in Christ. Because being born again is not a passive thing. It's not something that we just claim and we have, it's something that we live out in our call. That we are all called to be ministers of the good news. And what is the good news? That God loved us to the point that his Son would come and die on the cross, that we would understand that love and understand that sacrifice and understand the opportunity that we are being given. So that we could share it with others. That we would take that Spirit. That we would accept it into our lives, that we could live better lives. It's a matter of faith, because we are required to trust in Christ to provide us that new life, and to help us live it in this life and the next.

That's one of the things I wanted to tackle in this is understanding that when we talk about matters of faith, yes, sometimes it's a matter of blind faith, not knowing exactly how it's going to happen and how it's going to be done. I can tell you I have no idea, no idea what life after this one looks like aside from some vague images that were given. That the descriptions that were given are often what it will be like. But I fear it is beyond human comprehension. That we are so entrenched in this life, that we can never fully understand while being in this life exactly what that life would look like. However, what we are given is how to live this life in

preparation for the next. Next week, we talk about Journey's End. And so, we'll talk about that more next week.

But this week, I want to talk about what it means to live that life as someone who's born anew in Christ. That if we are born again in him, that it means that we live a life dedicated to God. That doesn't mean that we don't have dreams, and we don't have ambitions and that we don't have hopes and we don't have fears, and we don't have doubts, and we don't have worries. I have to say that because sometimes we feel that if we have any doubts, then we're not living up to that new life. What Scripture teaches me is that it's normal to have doubts and fears. That we look at the people who are central to our message of hope. And they're people that worry they aren't going to be able to do enough. People who worried that their mistakes will forever condemn them to never being good enough. People who worry that they're going to let God down. And the reason that matters is because we often hold ourselves up to this all or nothing attitude. This great black and white idea of good enough or not. We see Abraham, and Abraham wasn't sure. Yes, Abraham follows God in faith but Abraham was not sure about the life he was promised or the things he was called to do. But he decided to trust that God would get him there. Even if it was in spite of himself. We see Moses questioning whether or not God has made a mistake in even choosing him. We see David acknowledging his faults but always turning to God for help. One of the things that binds those people together is that in spite of those fears, and in spite of those faults, they put their faith in God, that God would see them through. That God would help them to live the life they needed to live. That God would help them to overcome. That when they did mess things up, that God would help them to make it right.

And what I see in all this is that when Christ talks about this idea of being born again, it's not an idea of something that we just do once. But it's an active process that we live out. Knowing that when we accept that life in Christ, we accept that sometimes we're going to need corrected. Sometimes we're going to need to be put back on the right path. But it opens up that opportunity to be put on the right path. Because we put our faith and our hope in the one who redeems us. That if Christ came in into the world to save us, we should trust in that. We should have hope in that. That we should rejoice in that. That our Savior came not to condemn, but to save. Not to look on us and say you're all miserable failures. But to say I love you, and I want to help you. I think sometimes we don't get that message and clear enough words. I love you, and I want to help you. That's the message I hear. That's the Gospel message. Not that we are beyond saving that we are beyond ever doing good. But that we can take that opportunity that God gives us, to live a life in Christ where we can do good. For through him, we can help. That we can be something more than we ever could be apart.

To me, being born again is the idea that God gives us a new life, not one where we are shackled by our limitations. Not one where we have to blame ourselves for everything that's ever going to happen and feel that we have no hope. And resign that we are worthless. But that the Holy Spirit is poured out on us. Open to all, that we may truly live. Not living a life based on

fear. Not living a life based on thinking that we're never good enough. But a life live knowing that Christ can make us so much more. That we have faith that Christ is the key to opening that door and to stepping up and saying I want to be part of this. I want to be part of what's good. And I want to be part of what's right. And I want to love the truth. And I want to help. That I want to be born again into the Spirit. Born again into a life that gives me a deeper meaning. That gives me hope. That gives me happiness. That gives me joy. Not just for me but a joy that I can share. That's the good news. That is the Gospel message. That we are not condemned to be failures because we're human, but that because we are human, we have been given an opportunity to be so much more. We have to reach out and accept it. Not just calling on the name of the Lord and thinking that that's what saves us. But that we call on the Lord to guide us and lead us, to shepherd us, to help us be innocent like those newborn infants. To wipe the slate clean. To wash us, to make us white as snow.

We are one people redeemed in Christ. And that we share that hope with others. That we have faith that promise is true. And because we have that faith, we can live lives dedicated to doing the work that we have been sent to do. Giving hope to the hopeless giving comfort to the afflicted. And sharing the message that Christ is for all. That the door to this wonderful new life is open to all. We call on the Lord not as a cliché. Not as a catchphrase. Not as a title. But as a way of life. And that our faith draws us together and draws us closer. And that we rest assured that Christ is with us always and everywhere. That we are God's children born anew, to serve our heavenly Father, following the path set for us by the Son that redeems us, with the Holy Spirit poured out for all. Amen

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** We confess to you, all-knowing God, what we are. We are not the people we like others to think we are. We are afraid to admit, even to ourselves, what lies in the depths of our souls. But we cannot hide our true selves from you. You know us as we are, and yet you love us. Help us not to shrink from self-knowledge. Teach us to respect ourselves for your sake. Give us the courage to put our trust in your guiding power. Raise us out of the paralysis of guilt into the freedom and energy of forgiven people. And for those who through long habit find forgiveness hard to accept, we ask you to break their bondage and set them free; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** We go forth now in faith and peace. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

### **Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers	Cindy Cisney
Patti Corder & Crew	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins
Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Don Stewart	Brenda Hurt	Anne Winkler Heinrichs
Michael & Makenzie Reynolds	Bill Gilbert	Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap
Family of Jim Croy	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols	Leo Smith
Family of Dan Eubank	Family of Charlotte Carrell	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes			

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### **Our Current Series – Matters of Faith**

This series looks at different aspects of our faith journey and how we live out our faith in Christ.

October 25th – *Born Again* – What it means to live a new life in Christ.

November 1st – *Journey's End* – A reflection on life to come.

November 8th – *Salvation* – A discussion of how we are saved.

November 15th – *Work and Faith* – The relationship between faith and works.

November 22nd – *Giving Thanks* – Why giving thanks is a faith matter.