

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

“I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where will my help come?” This of course is from Psalm 121 which we just read responsively. It’s a psalm that I have made part of my daily devotions, it’s a psalm that I have shared many, many times with those who are grieving, who are ill, or near death. It’s a comforting psalm for all of us, as individuals or to share with others when there is need or when we as Christian Lutherans are confronted by hostility from neighbors or from the world. Because the world we live in is as hostile and worrisome now as it ever was, to those who trust in God and try to live as followers of Jesus.

So this morning, in the midst of the hostilities, worries, problems that beset us comes a familiar story that you have probably heard before but perhaps not thought too much about. A Pharisee named Nicodemus comes in the night to Jesus to engage in conversation. Pharisees are in general hostile to Jesus, not every Pharisee but it’s probably fair to say, the majority of them as they watch Jesus to see if he is violating any of the laws, precepts and customs that they follow. Nicodemus comes looking for answers, and even though many Pharisees were hostile to Jesus, some were not as Nicodemus starts with a respectful title “Rabbi,” and then says “we know” indicating that some of his group were not hostile and were convinced that Jesus was someone special. They “know,” but the truth is as Jesus tells him in so many words, they apparently don’t know much.

Our gospel writer, John, talks a lot about knowing, about light, blindness, abiding or residing, relationship, and truth, all meant to help us understand Jesus, to know Jesus better, and through Jesus, to know God the Father, God the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

It’s critical to understand that there is only one truth, just one, no alternatives. There is a tension, especially now between true knowledge and false knowledge, there is a tension between following Jesus and walking in the light, or following the world and groping in the night. There is only one Holy Spirit and it does not work independently of the Word of God. Perhaps you remember the beginning verses from the Gospel of John where we are told the darkness doesn’t overcome the light, sometimes translated as the darkness doesn’t comprehend the light.

So Nicodemus comes to Jesus seeking to understand, but Jesus in his word play tells Nicodemus that the ability to comprehend what Jesus is doing and who Jesus is, isn’t the result of human intellectual ability but from elsewhere, from the Spirit which like the wind comes from where it will and neither Nicodemus nor anyone else know its origins or where it will go, think of our first reading from Genesis “while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”

Now this conversation with Nicodemus that night, is also a conversation with you and I this morning. Man is not the measure of all things and there is far more to life than the acquisition of money, power, fame or anything else. The Spirit continues its

work, going where it will, giving and growing faith and those who believe in Jesus and by the work of the Spirit know him, have life that will not fail, this not by our efforts but by the gracious love of God. Jesus tells Nicodemus one must be born from above, born by water and the Spirit, that what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Born from above, born again in the waters of our baptism with the Spirit of God sweeping over the face of the water and planting the seed of faith, the knowledge of Jesus, the knowledge of true life, lived in the Truth as children, sons and daughters of God. Not turned inward by our self-cultivated knowledge and wants but turned outward by the Spirit, descendants of Abraham by faith “in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” We, brothers and sisters, are turned outward by our faith, a gift of the grace of God, that we may see truly and clearly the world around us, that we who are disciples of Jesus share the love of God in all that we do and say.

That faith summed up in the words from our gospel reading “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 his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

I tell you now as your pastor, from this pulpit, that those who born again of water and the Spirit, who are turned outward by the Spirit to speak and do the truth of God, are desperately needed by the world around us.

AMEN