5-11 March 2023 John 3:1-17

A step into the unknown

Read the passage from John. It is written below.

**Jesus Teaches Nicodemus**

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.[e] 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

**Bible notes**

**Many believed in Jesus ‘because they saw the signs that he was doing’. But he ‘would not entrust himself to them’, ‘because he knew what was in everyone’ (2.23-25). Jesus requires more than a superficial response to ‘these signs that you do’, and with Nicodemus’ recognition that they reveal ‘the presence of God’ there begins a conversation suggesting that Jesus dares to entrust himself to this ‘leader of the Jews’. This trust is respected since Nicodemus will have the courage to speak up for Jesus to other leaders, appealing to the law for a fair hearing (7.50-51). And he will bring costly myrrh and aloes for Jesus’ burial (19.39-42). But we are not told whether the man who first came ‘by night’ ever openly acknowledged that ‘the law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth through Jesus Christ’ (1.17). Jesus acknowledges Nicodemus’ high regard for Moses, the greatest ruler of his people, who descended from Mount Sinai shining with divine glory (Exodus 34.29-35). The importance of right rule is reflected here in the references to the kingdom of God, which Jesus explains is ‘from above’, ‘of the Spirit’, ‘heavenly’, ‘eternal’, and indeed ‘not from this world’ (18.36). And Jesus shows his respect for Moses (how put a bronze serpent on a pole so that whoever looked at it would live; Numbers 21.9) to help Nicodemus understand that Jesus’ being lifted up on the cross will bring eternal life to all who believe. Nicodemus is slow to grasp these deep distinctions between what is eternal and what perishes, and the ambiguity of language has him confusing what is ‘from above’ with what is merely ‘again’. But he is poised to step into the unknown, leaving us with his open question, ‘How can these things be?’**

**Reflection**

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

What does Jesus mean, to be ‘born again’? The Greek word used for ‘again’ can also be (and is) translated as ‘from above’. This isn’t a second birth that just repeats our human birth. This is rebirth in the Spirit, the process of becoming a child of God. We can see it as a journey, rather than a one-off event – a spiritual rather than physical journey into a new life. This new life that comes from above is one given by God – a new life that starts with an experience of rebirth and leads eventually to eternal life. How do we respond to the challenge Jesus posed to Nicodemus? Are we ready to journey with the Spirit, wherever it blows us?

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* What is it like to try something new, challenging and a bit risky?
* Are there some new ‘holy habits’ you would be prepared to try?
* Will you need a bit of a push?

## Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

#### **A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

We thank you, Lord Jesus,
for the faithfulness of the disciples – so ready to help,
even though they didn’t understand what was going on.
We thank you for the joy we can have,
the hope in the unknown,
high expectations of your power in our lives,
courage to follow your Spirit in all we do.
We thank you for the unexpected experiences,
for the unexpected people we will meet, walking your way.
Go with us, Lord.
**Amen.**

## **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Let us go out with courage.
Let us go out with love.
Let us travel the world together,
held safe by our Lord above.
**Amen.**

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