

## The Grace That Transforms (John 3:1-17)

Many of us are familiar with John 3:16: **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life."** This verse captures the heart of the Gospel. Jesus calls us to be born again. So today, let us explore together what it means to be born again and what it looks like. This Sunday's Gospel is about the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus is a prominent Pharisee, a "ruler of the Jews," a "teacher of Israel." Even knowledgeable Nicodemus is confused by what Jesus says. He came to Jesus at night, perhaps afraid of being seen. Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about the kingdom of God and teaches about "eternal life" and the "world."

The world in John's Gospel is a place of darkness into which the light shines (John 1:11). So, we might immediately imagine the world as unholy, dark, and corrupt. But we must acknowledge that Jesus speaks of it positively to Nicodemus, saying that "God so loved the world." The world is not just a place of darkness and trouble because the world is loved by God. God loves this world by sending God's "only Son" for the sacrifice of the sins of the world. "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it." (John 3:17)

**Lent is a season of repentance.** During this time, we hear a lot about sin, wrongdoing, bad habits, and human mortality. But in the Gospel reading from John 3, we are reminded of something important—**Jesus was not sent to judge the world but to save it.** He did not come to leave us in our sin and condemnation but to bring salvation, healing and restoration. Jesus speaks about God's love: **"For God so loved the world..." and "Not to Judge."** God could have destroyed creation and started over. But, Instead, God chose a different way—God chose to become part of the creation, entering the world to recreate it from within by defeating the power of sin and death.

**Lent has traditionally been a time for repentance and confession of sin.** The word "repentance" means to turn around, to change direction. There are two ways we can confront our sin: **Fear and Judgement / truth and love.** Love is what truly changes people and transforms the world. Nicodemus came to Jesus seeking understanding, and Jesus answered that God's love is not about punishing sinners but about saving them. This was a radical idea for a religious leader who had spent his life teaching about laws and righteousness. The Pharisees believed that the Kingdom of God would come when Israel fully obeyed God's Law. Their understanding was legalistic and works-based, seeing obedience as the key to entering God's Kingdom. Jesus invited him to see beyond religious rules and recognize the heart of God—a heart that longs to bring people from darkness into light with grace.

Paul explains it this way in Titus 3:4-5:

**"When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:4-5(NIV)**

Lent is not just about judgment—it is about turning back to God in love. May we embrace repentance, not out of fear of condemnation, but with the deep assurance that we are loved, forgiven, and invited into new life.

However, being saved by God's grace doesn't mean we can live however we want. **John Wesley taught that true faith always leads to a transformed life, where we continually examine our hearts and grow in love, both for God and for our neighbors.** When we truly follow Jesus, we take time to reflect on our hearts and let His grace shape the way we live, love, and serve. v. 14. Jesus refers to the story of Moses and the bronze serpent (Numbers 21). When the Israelites sinned, God sent poisonous snakes, but God also provided a way of healing. To experience healing, the Israelites must **look to the serpent** raised above them: that is, **they must see the image of their sin and acknowledge their wrongdoing in order to accept God's gift of life.** Jesus compares this to His own mission. Just as the serpent was lifted up, Jesus would be lifted up on the cross. So Gazing upon the cross reveals to us our deep need for God's Grace and forgiveness.

Lent is an intentional period of our self-examination and returning to God. It is **a time of acknowledging our need for God's grace and love. It is a time of spiritual rebirth.** Jesus mentions that "I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to see God's kingdom."

Nicodemus struggled to understand what it meant to be "born again." He thought Jesus was speaking of a second physical birth, but Jesus was talking about a spiritual rebirth. To be born again means to receive new life through the Holy Spirit. The holy spirit leads us to the light to reflect on.

In John's Gospel, **Jesus is described as the Light and Life.** When we look to Him and receive His light, **He reveals truth.** That truth isn't always pleasant—it often exposes human failures, selfishness, fear, and wrongdoing. Yet, shining a light on our failures also reveals God's never-ending love and His work in our lives. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, He doesn't just forgive our sins—He gives us a new life. We are born again in the Spirit, beginning a new journey of faith. New birth is the beginning of holy life, the beginning of sanctification. In other words, it is the beginning of the transformation God desires for us.

As we see the life living here and now in this world, what does it look like for us who are born again to live each day? How does our way of life and our outlook become new? The idea of Human life (Martin Heidegger: a German philosopher). In his book *Being and Time*, three things are deeply connected and influence how we experience the world: Time, Space, and Humanity.

In Korean, the words for **time (시간), space (공간), and human (인간)** all share the common syllable "간" (**gan**). It means in Enlightening, "in-between," "relationship," or "connection."

When the relationship is good, we get along well. When the relationship is bad, we don't get along. Our relationship determines whether our life is good or bad. How do we relate to time in our lives? We don't just exist in time and space—we interact with them and **create meaning through our surroundings.** We divide time into **past, present, and future**

- **The past** is where our memories reside.
- **The future** is an unexperienced time filled with uncertainties, and these uncertainties often lead to anxiety.
- **The present** is where we live, reflecting on our past while facing the uncertainties of the future.

**Today is a time in between Memory and expectation.**

So, how do we live each day—here (in the world) and now (in the present)—as those who are renewed and reborn?"

In Methodist tradition, Methodists use John Wesley's **Covenant Prayer** to start the day. The prayer reflects to **John Wesley's "Three Simple Rules: 1)Do No Harm 2)Do Good 3) Stay in Love with God.**

Living a **born-again life** means seeing each day as a **gift and an opportunity from God.** It means choosing to do good, avoiding harm, and loving others. When we live this way, we welcome the **Holy Spirit** into our hearts each day.

**Today is an opportunity to become a better person than you were yesterday—a time to live with love.** One of the answers to the question: how do we live each day, here (space: the world) and now (time: the present) as a renewed, reborn life? We live today with gratitude, seeing it as a gift and an opportunity to become more loving people than we were yesterday. Nicodemus came with questions, searching for truth. Jesus invited him to move beyond human understanding and embrace the Spirit's work. We are invited to do the same. When we welcome the Holy Spirit, we receive the strength to walk in the light, care for others, and live as transformed people. During this season of Lent, let us reflect on God's love. Let us step out of fear and into grace. Let us live each day as a gift from God, allowing His love to transform us.

Jesus' words are clear: **"Not to judge... but to save, heal and restore."**

That is grace. That is transformation through love.

*"Gracious and Loving God, Guide my heart and actions today,  
That I may do no harm to others, In my words, in my choices, and in my silence.  
Let my thoughts be filled with kindness, My hands be used for healing,  
And my steps be directed toward peace.Help me to love as Christ loves,  
And to reflect Your grace in all that I do. In Jesus' name, Amen."*