

“Born-Again: Reclaiming Our Original Giftedness”

John 3:1-17

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January 29, 2023

Nicodemus was a smart fellow. He had a good deal of status in his community. He must have studied his scriptures and learned to teach them well. He was a real leader of religion. Lots of people must have looked up to Nicodemus. He probably felt good about his accomplishments. I wonder how many others leaders, he had excelled past. I wonder who hard work he had worded and good decision making and learned status had helped him to became a top leader. One commentator says this about him: “Nicodemus came to Jesus by night wondering what he needed to do to get in on what Jesus had.” What he had to do? He is a “ruler of the Jews” – an enlightened, scripturally well-formed person who is in the know. He has succeeded at religion. He is not simply a believer; he is a leader of all believers.” Sounds like a gifted fellow! Quite an accomplished person! I bet he was a good student!

When I was teaching high school science we had a term to describe some of our top students. This wasn't a term I chose, but this was present in the school system at that time. We called these top students 'gifted'. A gifted student back then was more than a straight 'A' student, they were more than a high achiever. A “gifted” student was one of the few children or young people who had tested well on a series of IQ tests. Something that might not be done much in the BC school system these days ... using IQ tests to determine giftedness.

Well! In all of these I heard one story from a mother who had four children, two of them were toddlers, and two in upper elementary school. This is the story she told. The school called her one day to tell her that one of her sons was found to be gifted by these IQ tests done on

children that they thought had promise. And one of her sons, has been discovered to be gifted. Now, she thought about her two sons. her eldest son was a quiet, daydreamy sort of child who really didn't seem to care much about school work. He liked PE and recess, those were his favorite parts of the day. And then, there was her second son, he had always been into things, he climbed early, super active and a real go-getter at school, a big talker and he got good marks. She was so happy to hear that all the difficulty she had raising her second son in his early years had turned out to be because he was gifted! Except when the teacher went further and actually told her which son had been tested for giftedness she was shocked to hear it was her eldest ... the quiet one who didn't seem to care about school at all.

Well! It changed how she looked at her oldest son. He was now among the elite. He was officially labeled gifted. He was recognised as special and set apart in a way that his mom had not expected. Not very many students achieve this special gifted status. Giftedness is for but a few when it comes to how, public school system does things.

Well, I'm here before you today Richmond Presbyterian to tell you that each and every one of you is gifted. If you want I can call and let your families know. I hope that they aren't too surprised! Can you believe it! So many gifted people in one room! See, Richard Topping gave me a call and said, Richmond Presbyterian is really full of a lot of gifted people. I mean one small elementary school only expects a handful of gifted students through their doors each year. Yet here we are, a room full of gifted people.

Now I know what some of you are thinking ... she's flattering us so we will keep coming to church ... off course not. Maybe some of you are thinking about your Sunday school lessons, your bible studies on spiritual giftedness. You know you have the gift of hospitality or the gift of discernment or the gift of encouragement. Yeah, sure! That is an important sort of giftedness and yes, I'm confident that every one of you has spiritual gift, two or three, or five from God. But I'm not alking about something like spiritual giftedness. Something, like even

more special than that as special as spiritual gifts are! I'm talking about the gift of salvation. The gift of belonging to Christ.

This amazing sort of giftedness is not designated for only a few. You don't need to pass a special test in order to be labelled as gifted with belonging in Christ. In fact this designation depends not all on you, or your personal characteristics, or your nature talents or the merits you've earned. It doesn't depend on how hard you try at things or how much you can accomplish, it depends only on God's freely given gift, Christ's miraculous and generous action in our lives through the cross and resurrection. Jesus won for us the life of belonging in Him, the life of belonging to God, the gift of daily freedom from sin. Jesus earned on our behalf all the merits needed. His report card is straight A's. His sacrificial death on our behalf makes it so that we need not be tested to pass a standard, but that we are simply given a beautiful, wonderful gift – entry into the family of God.

This giftedness is 100% available to all people.

Now some of us are disappointed, because we like being special. We like seeing the results of hard work we have put in. Some of us really work hard on our faith. But I encourage you, not to quash that disappointed voice inside you. Let it speak. Have compassion for it. It's been developed in a world that rewards hard work. It's ok. The part of you that really wants to work hard, and be labelled with a special giftedness. Give that little part of you a little hug, and then a nudge, and then take a deep breath, and embrace. Just because the gift is available to everyone, it doesn't diminish the profound transformative power of that gift. Some of us who have accepted the gift of belonging to God, we forget, we forget to live into the giftedness state of mind. We have accepted the gift from Christ, and at some point we know we gave our life to him and promise to walk in his ways. But somehow we haven't claimed that gift and haven't yet lived into the fullness of it.

You see that the gift of God's freely given graceful forgiveness that helps us to belong. It's not the end of our gifted life. It's not like opening a birthday gift, admiring it, thanking the one who gave it and then setting it aside. We don't just accept Jesus as Saviour and then set aside that astounding gift of new life, like a candle we never light, or an apron we never put on, or a tie we never wear, or a fancy hand soap we never use. A child drawing naïve on a scroll and. The Christian life is not one by which we hold our breath trying not to sin until we get to heaven ... we need to live into the gift.

So what does it look like to live into the life given us by God? It looks like depending on Christ. We are taught by our culture that independence and self-sufficiency are hallmarks of a life well lived. We are really conscientious, reliable and responsible. We do what it takes because it's the right thing to do. The problem with that is we fail to realize that God is the one who makes things happen.

In Romans 9:16 Paul says: "It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy." Paul means that the choice of who is saved and how salvation and blessing in life works isn't up to us and our desires and our efforts. We are saved by God's grace, not by our works. Without God's active interaction in our lives, we really wouldn't have much of a life. We go out into the world thinking it's all up to us. But that means we overlook everything that is up to God. And we run into brick walls and scary places when we discover aspects of our lives that are not under our control. Areas in life when all the conscientiousness in the world will not impact what is going on.

Psalms 67 says:

5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.

6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

7 My salvation and my honor depend on God;

he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

8 Trust in him at all times, you people;

pour out your hearts to him,

for God is our refuge.

It is unfortunate that such gifted people such as we are, get so lost in the journey of life so often, hoping our personal efforts will be enough. Seeking to make our way through life by our own will power. But there is action for us to take, a life of salvation is not a passive life – the psalmist says to trust, pour out our hearts, take refuge, find rest in God. Those are all concrete actions for us to take, to be awake, joyful and vital in our salvation life.

You see salvation is not something that was accomplished a couple thousand years ago and we just need to sign up to receive our little portion of it for it now. It's not a static one-time event you tick off your "to do" list. God's action in our lives is ongoing, working to mould us and change us, grow us and develop us. Our life as God's gifted children is not a lifetime of trying to pay God back for the amazing gift Christ gave us ... we can expect that our life as God's gifted children is a life of dynamic change and it is entirely dependent upon God's transformative and healing power. Salvation means expecting something dynamic to change in us, in each other, in our community of faith.

It was hard for Nicodemus to understand the transformative and healing power of God through Jesus. He was a learned man and was used to being able to find out what to do and how to do it right, then doing it himself and receiving all the gain and credit. So much so that he was not willing to risk his status among his peers and those who looked up to him, so he visited Jesus under the cover of darkness when he decided he might need some answers, some help. Do you do that? Do you visit Jesus only on stealth mode? Do you live most of your day putting out the vibe that you've got it all together and your life is yours to control

and yes, you've really got it under control? Or do you submit yourself to God's will in your life, leaning heavily on Jesus every day to get you through, to show you the way, to make things happen in your life.

It was so hard for Nicodemus to understand God's way of intervening in our lives, so hard for him to understand the freely given gift of salvation and its transformative power that he scoffed at Jesus when he heard he had to be born again. His human mind, stuck in the world where he was a man who makes things happen, could not comprehend the kingdom of God where God makes things happen, where being born again into God's family, born by the Spirit and water, being born from above, is a re-birth that does not depend on crawling back into your mother's womb, rather depends on a radical giving over of yourself to God and a whole hearted acceptance of a life-changing gift from Christ. It was hard for good old Nic, he was used to making things happen himself.

Let's be like Nicodemus, let's seek out Jesus and ask him how it is that we can live a blessed and saved life today. But let's not be so short-sighted as to think that what is required of us is going to come from our own will power, our own intellect and our own motivation. This life of being born from above is a life of dependence on God's power from above. Plug into that power each and every day. Come to see yourself as a conduit of God's power, as one whose daily blessings flow from God, as one who consults God on every decision, who calls on God's power for every action undertaken. This is a transformative way to live into your giftedness.

Don't forget that our God is no fossilized statue or old guy who set the world in motion like a clock maker, sitting back to just watch what happens. Our God is present, active and intervening currently in this world and our lives and our faith community. Christ is not a puppet master pulling arbitrary strings in your life either. He is a graceful and generous participant in your life. He is the very energy of life and he's a well of strength and wisdom you are meant to draw on. The Holy Spirit wants to see you prosper and wants to protect and

guide you through the rough patches of life. If you are too conscientious you may miss a lot of opportunities to lean on God and receive the rest Jesus speaks of when he says come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Come to him, claim your giftedness and let God do the heavy lifting in your life!