

**Of Course, I’ve Been Saved!**

**May 27, 2018**

**John 3:1-17**

**Holy Trinity Sunday**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one God sent to prove His love for you, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

I saw in the news a couple of days ago the once successful and powerful Hollywood movie maker, Harvey Weinstein was finally placed in handcuffs and arrested after several women accused him of everything from inappropriate behavior, sexual harassment, to rape. Since those first allegations came out over 160 others have been similarly accused of similar grossly inappropriate behavior. As I thought about all the women he abused and all the others that have come out accusing powerful men in the entertainment business, politics, and even in regular ordinary businesses, I remembered a story about a very attractive young woman whose job required her to travel a great deal, most of the time with other men from her firm. After all these allegations started coming out she was asked by a friend if she ever felt pressured by men in positions of power when she was on one of those business trips or even when she was simply out on the town for an evening of fun. Her answer my help any of you who are in situations where someone is making unwanted advances. She told her friend that whenever she is on the receiving end of unwanted advances she uses a simple five-word defense that anyone can learn and memorize. She looks the one making the unwanted advances straight in the eyes and asks, “Have you been born again?” Invariably the perpetrator drops his advances and beets a hasty retreat as fast as his feet will carry him.

Evidently, I’m not the only one who doesn’t care for the terminology Jesus uses with the Jewish religious leader and Pharisee, Nicodemus. Asking someone if they’re born again is right up there in my book along with asking Have you been saved? I personally consider both questions more than annoying, downright insulting. I think the reason I find this language off-putting is because the terms have been co-opted and misused so much. The normal process follows something like this. First the question, have you been born again. Second, comes the things you have to do in order to make that happen. Does anyone besides me see the fallacy in that line of thinking? What I have to do in order to be born again? What does a baby do in order to be born? Isn’t it the mom doing all the work? Maybe the dad is coaching and holding her hand, but mostly the mom… The baby has birth happen to it. That’s how salvation works.

On the other hand, if someone has to ask if I’m born again, I might need to look at my life and my behaviors. I mean, if I’ve been born from above and I now walk in obedience to the will of God, shouldn’t my life be a walking, talking testimony to the love of God shown and proven through the resurrection of Jesus Christ? If I’ve been asked about my status regarding this second birth, then obviously I’m not letting my good works be seen by others, giving glory to God in heaven. There’s an old saying that goes, if Christianity were illegal in the United States, would there be enough evidence in your life to convict you?

What "born again" means is literally to begin all over again, to be given a second birth, a second chance. The one who is born again doesn't all of a sudden get turned into a super-Christian. To be born again is to enter afresh into the process of spiritual growth. It is to wipe the slate of one’s past, clean. It is to cancel your old mortgage and start again. In other words, you don't have to be always what you have now become. Such an offer is too good to be true for many, confusing for others, and very offensive to those who think they’re already pretty good people. For those who seek to be other than what they are now, who want to be more than the mere accumulation and sum total of their experiences, the invitation, “You must be born again,” is an offer you can’t afford to refuse.

Christianity teaches our human problem is selfishness, a failure to live up to the moral and ethical values, which is what Christianity calls “sin.” We’re born this way and there’s nothing we can do to change our true nature. We all know there are many different religions in the world, in our own country. Not denominations… but religions we have never even heard about growing up. There’s a fundamental difference in the way other “religions” tell us we can have salvation… eternal life beyond death.

Every major world religion has had a “teacher” who prescribed codes of behavior, that if kept will allow one into the ultimate paradise beyond death. Even the “New Age” religions that blend Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity will tell you that Jesus was a man whose lifestyle should be copied. The difference is that Jesus said: “I am the way, the truth and the life….” No one comes into my Father’s eternal home except through me. How can he say that? It sounds so intolerant? Well, it is quite simple. The bones of the creators and teachers of all other world religions are still in the ground. Only Jesus is different. He rose from death with a physical, glorified body.

If you’re seeking to avoid sin, to live morally so that God will bless you or accept you into eternal life beyond this earth, then you might be looking at Jesus as a teacher, a model, a helper, even Lord, but you are avoiding Him as your Savior. If you are trusting in your own goodness…. Well, I’m better than other people I know… therefore…” rather than trusting Jesus to enable you to stand before a Holy and perfect God….your heart will be anxious. Your heart will sense insecurity, and you maybe irritable because you know you are not measuring up…

Self-salvation through good deeds may produce a great deal of moral behavior, but inside you will know it’s not enough and God knows it’ll never be enough. Your hope has no sure foundation. If you depend on your own “good deeds” you’ve built your house on sand and you will worry about your eternal address. That’s exactly why Nicodemus, an upright, religious Pharisee came to Jesus at night.

The moral and spiritual standards of all religions are very high. Pharisees like Nicodemus knew deep down he wasn’t living up to those standards. He wasn’t praying enough. He wasn’t loving and serving his neighbor as much as he should. The result was internal anxiety, insecurity, irritability, and ultimately despair and hopelessness.

First, we can say of Nicodemus he was a religious man. He clearly knew the Decalogue by heart and the Torah by memorization. In John's Gospel he is referred to not just as teacher but “a great teacher”, pointing to his religious preeminence. If anyone knew the truth about God and God's people, surely it would be this man. Yet, for all of his religiosity, Nicodemus was not a fulfilled man. There was emptiness within him his religion had not filled.

Human devised religion operates on the principle that: “I obey… therefore I am accepted by God.” The Bible tells us I am accepted by God because Jesus died on the cross in my place. God has promised the way to deal with human “sin”, our failures, is to transfer all of the righteousness and holiness of Jesus to us, and then place all of our broken moral failings on the cross with Jesus. My obedience to God’s Law and to Jesus Commands isn’t about finally being acceptable or good enough. It’s about thanksgiving, gratitude, and the joy of already being accepted and forgiven. That’s I obey and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The primary difference is motivation. In manmade religions, we try to obey the divine standard out of fear. If we don’t obey we are going to lose God’s blessings in this world and the next we’ll be cast out into that outer darkness. When we hold on to Jesus, the motivation is one of gratitude for the blessings of forgiveness. God has said: I will remember their sins no more… I will accept them because Jesus died and rose from the dead.

On this Memorial Day and Festival day of the Holy Trinity, may we not only remember the sacrifices of our fellow countrymen and women, but also the sacrifice Jesus made for you and for me. May we forever give up on trying to make salvation a payment or reward for our good behavior. Through the power of the living Holy Spirit within each of us, may we learn to trust in what Jesus already did for you and me and know it was enough. May we be ready with quick reply when someone asks if you’ve been born again, “Yes I have been born again, and again, and again. Every time I sin and every moment of every day that I wear this sinful human flesh, God’s Holy Spirit living in me, purifies me and gives me rebirth. Our question isn’t what must I do to receive eternal life, but now that Jesus has taken care on my eternity, what can I do to offer my thanks and praise? May you have great joy finding ways to say thank you to Jesus, amen.