

*Feel the Wind*

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 12:1-4, John 3:1-17

Have you ever been in a classroom where the teacher was trying to explain something to you and he or she tried five different ways and you still did not get it? Then finally it dawns on you and you say, "I see!" It usually happened for me in an algebra class - sometimes it took longer in a geometry class.

History, time, nature, who we are - all of these things have been changed by people who struggled and tried five different ways to solve a mystery, then finally "got it." Let me show you what I mean by a couple of people - mathematicians - who struggled and dreamed and finally found it - and changed the way you see the world.

Archimedes, 200 years before Christ, wanted to know what makes a ship float, and after all his questions he got the answer sitting in a bath tub. It just came to him. If you could weigh the water that the object replaces, you could find out how much force was pushing the object back to the surface. When it came, Archimedes cried out "Eureka - I've found it."

Twenty centuries later there is Einstein [who by the way really did *not* fail 5<sup>th</sup> grade math]. In 1905, he was working in a Patent Office in Germany by day so that he could write down equations in the night. He thought the way Newton saw the falling apple was just a bit simplistic. Einstein wound up saying that the apple and the force of gravity that pulls it to the ground are really the same thing, that matter and energy are really just two sides of the same reality. It took a long time for people to understand what Einstein discovered, but mark my words - the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the rest of time as we don't yet know it can be traced back to Einstein's Eureka!

I could go on, but I hope I have already confused you enough to prepare you for this scripture! Maybe you remember that time in math class you learned that anything times "0" is still "0." It made no sense at all, until... Eureka! And maybe you think Einstein will always be beyond you because he was a genius. The place of confusion and question is the place for the birth of a new way of seeing things. It is where we need to be most all the time in faith. Faith is working full time when we *don't* have the answer. When we think we have the answer and see everything, we think we don't need faith. This morning the scripture lesson is really confusing, but there is a Eureka in it if we are willing to question the way we see it and admit we don't have many answers.

And that is where Nicodemus was when he came to Jesus under the cover of darkness to get some light on some things he did not understand at all.

Before we jump to what Jesus says is his problem, let's see how Nicodemus saw it in the dark.

He is a Pharisee and leader of the Jews. That does not make him a bad person, although some of Pharisees were power-full and fear-full people who loved the darkness so much they kept their eyes closed all the time. Nicodemus has his eyes wide open in his darkness; he just needs some light. And he comes to Jesus, because the way he is seeing the world in the dark is

not working for him at all. Things don't add up. Nicodemus sees holiness and goodness the way any good Jew of his day saw it - or he thinks *should* see it, or they are not good Jews. Follow the Torah and little laws, pray daily, keep yourself clean by staying away from anything and anyone you are told is not clean. Add to your own goodness and avoid the negatives of sin and law-breaking. Associate with your own who are the chosen, and stay away from the foreigners who are enemies of God.

These are the ways Nicodemus had been taught, and he is a Rabbi/teacher and a leader among the Pharisees! These are the ways he teaches. He keeps working the equations, plugging in the variables to the laws, but the answers are all wrong. He needs to start over. He is like Archimedes or Einstein saying that that he needs a different equation, because the old equation is the very thing that keeps him in the dark.

And Nicodemus sees a distant and distinct light out of the dark. He has heard about Jesus, watched Jesus, listened to Jesus. Jesus is a Jew that people call Rabbi/teacher. Jesus is a great teacher. What he is teaching is so different to Nicodemus that it puts him in confusion, but it still makes more sense. Jesus answers more of the problems of living in holiness, and Nicodemus wants to know why? He wants his answers to be correct. He wants to make the perfect score that will bring him into the Kingdom. So, he comes to Jesus in his darkness.

Like any great teacher, Jesus bypasses the very things that are making the student confused, and jumps straight to the lesson that will confuse them further. Remember – confusion is the place where we can learn to see things differently. “Nicodemus, you can't see the kingdom without being born from above. You have to be both water *and* Spirit; you have to be both flesh *and* Spirit. People and life can't be reduced to flesh. ...You look confused; that is good. Let me explain...

“Nicodemus, you will never see the kingdom of God by trying to add up your rule-keeping to get a perfect score. There is another whole side to the equation that you are missing, and it is the part that gives life to the flesh. You have to have Spirit to give meaning and sense to the laws. You have to have a spiritual life you can't see to give purpose to the physical existence you do see. You need to look beneath and beyond the surface - where you can't see. You get the wrong answer all the time on holiness, because you don't look past what you can see. You spend all your time looking on the physical, outward things that appear, and so you judge good and evil by what you see. It's like you have heard me say about the little laws: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person; it is what comes from inside and out of the mouth, because these things come from the heart - the spirit. You put physical before spiritual. You have it all backward.

“Let me explain, Nicodemus. You know that the Hebrew word for 'spirit' is the same word for 'wind.' You are looking at the trees and missing the wind. You see the leaves move, but you can't see the wind. You see live trees and dead trees the same way you judge people as good and evil. But you are missing the wind. It blows wherever and whomever, and you can't know where it came from or where it is going. You want everything set fixed and solid so you can be a tree. People aren't trees. They are flesh *and* Spirit. You can't know about the kingdom of God unless you are willing to put yourself out there in the wind and let it blow *you* wherever. Then you are at the mercy of the wind, but you are also in the spirit place where you have to trust the Spirit. Don't you remember Abraham? He started it all, before there were any little laws. He did not know where he was going, and the wind blew him in all directions. But he trusted God and the wind, and he stayed faithful.

“You still look confused. Let me change the metaphor and answer your question about birth... Of course you can't be born again. You can't go back to the womb and start life over again. That is not the point. You are thinking flesh without the spirit, and that is the point. You have to be born anew to spirit, and that is different. You have to look past the flesh, you have to live beyond the physical, you have to get over living by what you can see and start living by what is beyond your seeing and your knowing and your understanding.

“You have to look past the trees and feel the wind. Real life is never superficial life, on-the-surface life. You are looking at appearance, at surface. You have to look past what you can see to find what is real. You have to live by what you feel and hear and see and touch with spiritual senses, not physical senses.

“Nicodemus, you are getting the wrong answers to holiness and faith, because you are looking for the holiness without the faith. You have the wrong equation. You take the external laws of good and bad and judge whether people are good and bad. That is what Pharisees have always done and will always do. You have forgotten the main equation.

“You have forgotten the one Law that puts flesh-living and spirit-living together, that puts trees and wind in perspective. You know all the external laws in the book, but you have forgotten the internal Law of the Heart: ‘Love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength’ - those are Spirit places, Nicodemus, give yourself to the reality you cannot see - the God who comes to you with promise and keeps covenant in faithfulness. If you are born anew to loving God with all you are in your spirit, you will start loving your neighbor in the Spirit, too. Then you will feel the wind, and know you have found it.” And Nicodemus said, “Eureka!”

There is a spiritual life and a physical life, and God is found in life in the Spirit. That is where the heart and mind and soul and strength find love that cannot die. We give ourselves to that love, and change the equation that measures our days – and we are born anew. The equation makes the mystery clear: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

And so the Rabbi/teacher turns to us in our darkness looking for the light of life, and says, “Here's how the equation works once you give yourself to me, once you are born anew of the Spirit. Just look at me and why you come to me. You see in him a Spirit in the Wind, and through me you see that God really does love the whole world - all the people who think they are clean – like you do, and those people who most everything thinks are unclean I am with all the time. God didn't come into the world to condemn anyone, but to save everyone. God gave me to the world to show everyone how much God loves, and to tell them they can trust that love to save them.

We all need to be born anew. We need to change our equation and see everything differently. We have to step out into the wind. Our eyes are open, but we are in the dark. Trust God enough to step out into the light. Then you will live in trust with Christ. Then you will love like God loves. Then you will hear God's voice and feel the wind of the Spirit. Then you will know that you have been born to-new and live a new life in my love. And you will pray prayers of thanksgiving that say, “Eureka. I have found it. I have been found in Christ.”