

I Tell You the Truth

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Second Sunday in Lent) is John 3:1-17. This is the story of Jesus and Nicodemus.

It has rightly been said that these verses contain the whole of Christ's teaching. If we had nothing except these verses, we would know the way of salvation.

Nicodemus was a good Pharisee and a member of the ruling Sanhedrin. He practiced righteousness outwardly and believed that his own achievements were in themselves a sufficiency. As a Pharisee and ruler, he undoubtedly knew the OT well. Nicodemus does not see Jesus as Savior, but merely as a teacher. He bases this belief on the signs.

His secret visit was probably because he feared he would be exposed to the ridicule and hatred of his fellows, or because he thought himself too eminent a person to compromise his dignity by making this visit in public.

Like most Jews of his time, Nicodemus thought of the kingdom of God in political terms. He expected that one day God would send a revolutionary leader, who would inspire the Jews to throw out the Roman army of occupation.

Jesus is neither flattered nor does He "talk down" to Nicodemus. Three times Jesus says "I tell you the truth." (3,5,11). And this truth leads to eternal life for Nicodemus and for us.

Nicodemus does not understand when Jesus says to be born again of water and the spirit. Jesus goes on to teach him the importance and work of the Holy Spirit. While we may not understand how it works, but by faith what we receive in baptism is something real and powerful.

Jesus takes Nicodemus back into the Scriptures (OT) to point out that just as the snake was uplifted on a cross, so salvation of the world come by him going to the cross.

We often call John 3:16 the gospel in a nutshell. It is so clear that little children know and believe. It is the everlasting truth that never changes. Many of us have known it since we were little. It is "the truth" that hasn't changed and never will. It is of incredible comfort right up to our final days.

John reinforces that positive message of this text by ending with the assurance that Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was not to condemn but save the world.

Prayer: O heavenly Father, grant that my life may be a vivid testimony to Your sacrificial and faithful love in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)