

Wrestling with Scripture: John 3:1-17

A Worksheet for March 12, 2017

Listening and Responding to the Scripture Passage

3 phrases that we might pay attention to are:

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|--|
| 1) | - first impression: | <i>What are the 2 questions that Nicodemus asks?</i> |
| | | How can |
| | - expanded meaning: | How can |
| 2) | - first impression: | <i>What are 2 questions that you would ask?</i> |
| | | |
| | - expanded meaning: | |
| 3) | - first impression: | |
| | | |
| | - expanded meaning: | |

Listening and Responding to the Sermon

What are 3 things that are worth noting about Nicodemus?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Identify 3 challenges with this scripture:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

In broad terms, there are 3 ways we can approach scripture that we find challenging or difficult:

- put aside our own views, and just accept the scripture for what it is
- deny its value and move on to something we like better (whether scripture or not)
- explore the context, the many meanings of the words, our own culture and views, and then decide if and how it offers us insight

Which of these approaches do you use most often?

Which one do you want to use with this passage?

What might this passage be saying to you today?

John 3:1-17

Our scripture reading comes from the Gospel according to John. This reading contains a very familiar passage, which some find filled with hope while others find it very challenging. It might be helpful to think about the language a little as we listen. First, the phrase “eternal life” – this is not just about an idea of resurrection or life after death, but about life now, how we live now. A second phrase is “born again” which we often associate with modern day “born again Christians.” Here, the idea suggests that something else matters rather than your ancestry. For the Hebrew people, faith was closely tied to family. Jesus’ words suggest that who your parents or grandparents are is not enough, something else is needed. A third word we need to rethink is “believe.” First we need to notice that it is a verb – it involves action and intention. Often our society reduces an idea of belief to a matter of intellectual assent, what we think is true. This idea is a little like a checklist, as if we can just check off the boxes. However, the long Christian tradition emphasizes something other than this exercise of our minds, instead focusing on a more wholistic, richer understanding of what faith means. Marcus Borg points out that the words “belief” and “belove” are actually closely related. Belief is about how we live – living in relationship, and living with love. So with this in mind, let’s listen to this possibly inspiring, likely challenging, story:

John 3: 1-17 (The Inclusive Bible)

A certain Pharisee named Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, came to Jesus at night. “Rabbi,” he said, “we know you’re a teacher come from God, for no one can perform the signs and wonders you do, unless by the power of God.”

Jesus gave Nicodemus this answer:

“The truth of the matter is,
unless one is born from above,
one cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus said, “How can an adult be born a second time? I can’t go back into my mother’s womb to be born again!”

Jesus replied:

“The truth of the matter is,
no one can enter God’s kingdom
without being born of water and the Spirit.

What is born of the flesh is flesh;
what is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

So don’t be surprised when I tell you that
you must be born from above.

The wind blows where it will.

You hear the sound it makes,
but you don’t know where it comes from
or where it goes.

So it is with everyone

who is born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be possible?” asked Nicodemus.

Jesus replied, “You’re a teacher of Israel, and you still don’t understand these matters?

The truth of the matter is,

we're talking about what we know;

we’re testifying about what we’ve seen –

yet you don’t accept our testimony.

If you don’t believe

when I tell you about earthly things,

how will you believe

when I tell you about heavenly things?

No one has gone up to heaven

except the one who came down from heaven –

the Chosen One.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,

so the Chosen One must be lifted up,

so that everyone who believes in the Chosen One

might have eternal life.

Yes, God so loved the world

as to give the Only Begotten One,

that whoever believes may not die,

but have eternal life.

God sent the Only Begotten into the world

not to condemn the world,

but that through the Only Begotten

the world might be saved.