

## "Shaped By The Story"

"Again and Again, Over and Over!"

Psalm 121; John 3: 1-17

March 12, 2017 Second Sunday in Lent

After Psalm 121....the psalmist trusts;  
Before John 3.....Nicodemus questions

~~~

The psalmist trusts.  
Nicodemus questions.  
Jesus invites....

invites us into the miraculous story  
of who we *really* are...born to be! ...*again!*

For God so loved the world, God gave his only child,  
that all may be saved through him.

Actually, the point is in the next verse,  
the point I think Jesus would have us remember  
*rather than* this most often quoted verse.  
*Because it's more hands on helpful!!*

You see, for Jesus it's not about Jesus...it's about God.  
Each of our personal relationships with God!  
It's about you!

Listen to Jesus...  
Indeed, God did not send Me into the world  
to condemn the world, **to catch you being bad,**  
**to blame you or shame you,**  
**certainly not to punish you...**  
**that's not why God sent me!**

That's not how I save!

God sent Me in order that the world might be saved through Me....I am the lens through which God would have you look at life...

to help you see the choices more clearly,  
see consequences more dearly....

**before they shape you;**

**to give you courage to stop what you are doing,**

**stop doing what is not working for you....  
so you can save your spectacular self!**

How?

Jesus never set himself up to be worshipped as an icon or as a God! So worshipping Jesus isn't it....

**Instead** Jesus offers His life as a living example in a tough world...a way we too can live new lives.

**Living the ways Jesus lives is the Way.**

Jesus shows us ways to live with integrity and joy....a meaning centered life that matters every day.

Be shaped in these ways!

**With Jesus as your lens for looking at the day...it's like a breath of fresh air....that wind**

**He speaks of to Nicodemus...spirit.**

Born again, you can breathe again and see again and be again.

A chance to get into "shape"...your best shape!

Here's the amazing thing about Nicodemus:

...something in him pushed him to go and keep asking his questions, to keep muttering to Jesus the question: "How is this possible?"

I think what he really was asking is....  
how is it possible for me to believe in what I cannot understand or see, even if I really want to?

How is it possible my life can ever be different?  
This is what Jesus responds to next in the story.

And, well, actually, it isn't possible...life is impossible...to understand, to change...when ...  
you go it on your own and believe only in past versions of your story and won't imagine new endings to your story.  
Impossible...unless...you believe without seeing (which takes you beyond a set of right ways of thinking to living life as a daily spiritual practicum.)

Believe in the power of our "Impossible, Amazing God"  
whose love continually defies what is known,  
what is possible by worldly standards.

...a God whose love of each one of us is formidable and can transform a "no-way-Jose" kind of belief into a powerful new way of seeing our own possibilities.

When we can believe in ourselves as God believes in us, we can begin to claim a new life...with God's help.

And get into shape...be re-shaped!

While *we may* not be a constant  
in showing up in our own lives,  
God shows up and is constantly nudging us  
to shape ourselves a new life!

\*But it is easier to believe in microwaves and cyber attacks and fake news

than it is to believe in God's presence as known through Jesus.....at least.....at first.

Ahhh...Believing, it's like a breath of fresh air...  
a process of breathing in possibility and hope....  
and exhaling falseness and pride and mistakes....  
Being released from that critical inner voice.

Believing not in ideas...but living more like Jesus said...born from above...actually another valid translation for these words is "Born anew"!

**Born anew over and over again as we grow up anew in God's grace.**

Not born again, once!  
Born anew over and over again....  
in spirit, in action, within community.  
Faithing vs believing, actually.

Maybe Jesus was Presbyterian!  
We Presbyterians claim as one of our core guiding principles "reformed and reforming"

**...not born again...but continuously born anew, re-forming ourselves,  
re-shaping our lives over and over again,  
a perpetual process of continual reshaping.**

Monday night Brad said it this way,  
"You can start your day over any time you want."

Born anew.....Nicodemus was struggling.

He knew the stories about Jesus were true,  
but they were just so incredibly hard to believe...imagine how hard!

Gosh, if you could just believe...that would change everything....but it's no wonder he struggled ....  
we struggle!

**What a brave human being Nicodemus was...**

**to ask his questions...of the person who could answer them...even if he was afraid and felt he could only come to ask under the cover of darkness....privacy!**

Perhaps it was Psalm 121 which he would have known well that sustained him in courage. He looked up! Got a bigger perspective...storyteller/narrator/non-anxious presence perspective.

He went out so he could come back in...within God's keeping. If you have to go, do, come back and assess!

**He asked.** In asking, questioning, doubting,

he began for himself an amazing journey to wholeness and life....you see even though this story ends with him being confused at best, it is not the end of his story.

Nicodemus shows up two more times in John's gospel. He comes to Jesus' defense later in the story... 4 chapters later... as the Pharisees begin to plot to be rid of him.

By the way, the Pharisees let him know that if he defended Jesus, he is suspect as well. That's a threat! Sound familiar?

But he stays in process and comes to place within himself...a place of faithing...as he goes with Joseph of Arimathea to prepare Jesus' body after his crucifixion.

*The story reads...Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came....*

It's a process for Nicodemus....coming into the light...seeing clearly...saving himself, shaping himself!

His personal miracle changes everyone's possibilities. It works like that...yes, it does!  
Your choices shape others powerfully!

Born again? Na....

I think it would be better said:

**Saved again....and again! From ourselves.  
It's a process. Do-overs daily!**

It's not an easy process to look at yourself and your motivations, your fears and doubts, your choices...

to look to the ways of Jesus to see how to shape your life differently and breathe new life into your life...

**It takes...trust....trust God keeps you...**  
no matter where you are in your process.

*Brad said, "If you're sleeping by the edge of a cliff. Pray and roll away from the edge!"*

You can trust that God keeps

...God keeps you and will not let your foot(ing) be moved lest you should fall....now, you might move that foot....and boom!

Even if you do, God's got cha'....is with you.

God is as close as your right hand to provide shade from the scorching life can bring....step into it....  
cool off! Cool down. Think!

God will keep you from all evil....mind you that doesn't say keep all evil from you or that you won't place yourself in evil's way, the faithing often find themselves in harm's way...

but even if life/evil overtake you,

God keeps you until you are born anew again...preserves what is good in you, right in you, holy in you.....

even if this takes "forevermore".

God is with you in your going out and your coming in.

From where does your help come?

....in the face of doubt, trouble, daily life....

Well, it doesn't come from the

TV screen,

the newspapers,  
the gossip mill,  
complaints,  
bickering,  
books,  
gurus,  
trying to be on the winning side rather than the losing side...

### **Your help comes from.....God in YOU!**

Like the wind, the spirit comes into our lives.  
It is unseen, but its effects very much felt.  
It blows where it will, where we wish it wouldn't blow sometimes.

The spirit blows into the very hard and dark places  
of our lives. It is the "night" of our belief with a new day about to "dawn" in our faith.....  
every day a new dawn.

Feel the brush of the spirit as She blows by you this morning inviting you to "rebirth" your life...  
start the process of living a faith filled, peace filled life of trust. How you will be shaped!

“Let whoever seeks not cease from seeking until they find. When you know yourselves, you will be known, and you will know you are children of the living God. But if you do not know yourselves, you live in poverty and you yourselves are the poverty...”

Gospel of Thomas

We are not asked to live as if we are not hurting....but we are asked:  
How are you going to be shaped by the possibilities that are there, right under the surface of our life?

### **Will you be shaped by the Master Story?**

**Now**...take a breath....bring to mind what it is that touches you most in the prompting of this morning's worship/oneness so far.

Another way to say it is what's the one thing that stays with you and feels powerful, life giving and will go with you?

Bring it to mind. Now, capture it in a 2-Word story. Write it. Put it in your pocket, in your car, on your nightstand.

Hold these 2 word stories together as you move through Lent!