

# SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

## Trinity Sunday

May 30, 2021

### Psalm 29:1–11 (ESV):

1 Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the LORD, over many waters.

4 The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;  
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;  
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth  
and strips the forests bare,  
and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

11 May the LORD give strength to his people!  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

## **First Reading: Isaiah 6:1–8 (ESV):**

### **Isaiah's Vision of the Lord**

6 In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

### **Isaiah's Commission from the Lord**

8 And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

## **EPISTLE: Acts 2:14; 22-36 (ESV):**

### **Peter's Sermon at Pentecost**

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.

22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. 24 God raised

him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.  
25 For David says concerning him,

“ ‘I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;  
26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
my flesh also will dwell in hope.  
27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.  
28 You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

29 “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. 33 Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. 34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“ ‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
35 until I make your enemies your footstool.” ’

36 Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

### **THE GOSPEL - John 3:1–17 (ESV):**

#### **You Must Be Born Again**

**3** Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” **3** Jesus

answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

**9** Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10** Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

### **For God So Loved the World**

**16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

### **Sermon 22 – Trinity Sunday**

#### **“Above Born”**

#### **John 3:1-17**

Dear friends,

Nicodemus is a classic example of missing the point, but the question I want to ask you is what did he miss? God is not petty or cruel, God doesn't deliberately hide the truth from us in order to prove Himself right or smarter. We know this. When God wants to teach, He is all-powerful enough to teach us in a way that we can learn. Jesus is God, as Trinity Sunday would remind us, so why does Jesus not really seem to get anywhere with Nicodemus? What is this Pharisee getting wrong, if anything? Finally, what does this mean

for us? At heart this is Jesus showing us so much of the basics, the essentials, of our Christian faith, not just what is but how it is done. That's what this is about. Jesus shows us, through His words, just what it means to be Christian and even shows us just how it is done.

This is John 3, we are early days in the Gospel, but a lot's been done because John structures His Gospel very differently than the other writers. So far, John has given us summary of the points he wants to make by recording Jesus' life, that happens in chapter 1. Later in John chapter 1, John the Baptizer testify to who Jesus is: This is the Lamb of God, and He is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit. It is this testimony, these words about Jesus, that frames how we understand the next chapters. John the Baptizer says that "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him," then He says this is the guy that gives out the Holy Spirit. So this Gospel wants you to think of Jesus as the Spirit-giver, the one who has the Holy Spirit in Him, and who brings the Holy Spirit to His chosen people. You can talk about Jesus a bunch of ways. He's Savior, He's Messiah, He's the Son of God. They're all true. John wants to talk about Jesus as the giver of the Holy Spirit. That's what is important to these early parts of the Gospel.

Enter Nicodemus. **"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 2 This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."** This is not a bad reaction. Historically, we tend to take Nicodemus in good faith here. He's not putting on an act, he's genuinely interested and recognizes that Jesus comes from God and calls Him teacher. He doesn't have an attitude like the other Pharisees have, he's trying to learn more.

Jesus' response to this seems odd, to put it mildly. **"3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."** Your Bible doesn't get this wrong, but there's another way to say these words. Different words mean different things depending on how they're used, and Jesus does this here. When

Jesus says “born again” that is one way you can take what He says, but that same word can also mean “begotten from above.” So, unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Why do I mention this? Because it is important to understanding both Nicodemus' confusion and Jesus' answer here. Remember, Jesus is referring back to what John the Baptizer said about Him. I saw the Spirit descend from heaven and remain on him. Jesus is basically telling Nicodemus that he, with all his learning, with all his Pharisee-ness, with all his old age and everything he's seen in life, hasn't got a prayer of entering the kingdom of God. That seems harsh, doesn't it? Nicodemus isn't being hostile, he wants to learn, so why is Jesus being so standoffish? He's not. Jesus is showing Nicodemus just how much He has to learn. He is showing Nicodemus that education, smarts, the wisdom that comes from old age, none of that will get Nicodemus into the kingdom of God. You cannot see the kingdom of God unless you are born from above, and right now, there is only one person who is born from above, and that person is Jesus.

You see? Jesus is establishing, straight away, just how inaccessible God is to sinners like us. You cannot just go to heaven as you are. You cannot understand God, who He is, what He wants, on your own. It's too confusing, too strange, too far, its just not what makes sense here on this world. Jesus is showing Nicodemus and you this hard truth. You and God are far, far apart. You cannot reach God. You cannot hear God. You cannot hope to see the kingdom of heaven unless you are born from above, and you're not. Each one of you was born here below, like Nicodemus, children of a father and a mother. Jesus was begotten before the Father, as the Creed teaches, Jesus was begotten from above. We aren't. But that is exactly why Jesus is here. Remember, John wants you to see Jesus as the one who brings the Holy Spirit. John will gradually unpack and explain why that's important as the Gospel goes on. If we need to be born from above in order to see the kingdom of God, we need Jesus. He has the Holy Spirit. He gives the Holy Spirit. Only He can connect us to God, and we can only, only see the kingdom of God through Jesus.

There is no other way. We can't think our way there, we can't work our way there, fight our way there, argue our way there. We're stuck here on this earth with everything that means, all we can do is hear Jesus, and have Jesus give us the Holy Spirit.

That's what Jesus talks about next. **“4 Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”** Nicodemus has confused what Jesus is said, he's thinking in terms of his parents again. He's not thinking of God having to come down to Him and give Him the Holy Spirit. Jesus keeps right on track though. He tells Nicodemus that this is how this being born from above happens, this is what that means, water and the Spirit. That's how its done. We recognize the reference to Baptism straightaway. So Jesus is the one who is begotten from above. Jesus is the one who has the Holy Spirit. If we want to be like Jesus, if we want to be born from above, and if we want to see the kingdom of God, we need to get that Holy Spirit from Jesus. Baptism is how we get that Holy Spirit from Jesus, and because of that, we enter into the kingdom of God, and so we are born from above just like Jesus.

It's a lot to churn through for a relatively basic conclusion, I admit, but I wanted you to see this because the basics aren't basic. They're bottomless. You can always learn more about salvation, you can always understand more about Baptism, and you can talk about Jesus all day and never say everything on the topic. We don't get past these things, we're not above or beyond talking about them. All Jesus is doing with Nicodemus is illustrating what His new kingdom will look like, and how people will enter into it. He is also highlighting that our only hope for being with God comes from Jesus. Remember, folks, Nicodemus is not just a professional, he is an old professional. He has spent his entire life studying and teaching and talking about the Old Testament, God's own Word. How could he possibly miss it? The Bible is his whole adult life. He misses it because he is not born from above, he does not have the Holy Spirit, he does not have Jesus. Jesus says

that the Pharisees search the Scriptures, seeking eternal life, they're digging and digging, but those Scriptures are there to teach about Jesus. They're there to testify about Jesus. When you understand Jesus, when you have the Holy Spirit, the whole Bible makes sense. Without Jesus, you can spend your entire life in the Bible and completely miss the point. The Bible is Jesus' book, from beginning to end God is showing us how Jesus came to be the saint we could not be.

**“6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”** Again, there's other possible meanings here, for verse 8. Jesus might be using the illustration of the wind, it blows, you don't see it, but you know it's there, so it is with the Spirit. Let me put this another way. The word for wind and the word for spirit are the same word, both in Greek and Hebrew. So, the Spirit blows where it wishes, and you hear His voice. Jesus is presenting Himself as the one who has the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that makes you able to understand what's going on here. You're hearing the Spirit's voice right now, Nicodemus, this has always been and always will be about me and what I offer you, Jesus says. The new birth, from above, comes from Jesus speaking words to His people. That's what Nicodemus is missing, and that's what we're getting, here and now. Jesus words give us the Holy Spirit, and through that Spirit, we see Jesus all the brighter. Nicodemus, though, Jesus says He doesn't know it. He doesn't know that Jesus is speaking the Holy Spirit, and that's why He says, you don't know where all this is coming from or where it is going. Unless Nicodemus accepts Jesus for who He is, the one who carries the Holy Spirit, the one who gives out the Holy Spirit so that people may see the kingdom of God, Nicodemus will always be in the dark about what all this is for. Nicodemus was looking for a teacher. Jesus shows Himself as so much more than that. This is God, more than that,



this is the God who gives the Holy Spirit, and that Holy Spirit is the one who makes people born from above.

So what does all this mean for us? The more ways you see Jesus as who He is, the more you appreciate it, and that's why I'm doing this. Jesus is our savior, Jesus is our Lord, all true and these ways of talking about Jesus are useful. John doesn't do that, though. For you, Jesus is the one who has given you the Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit has, in turn, shown you that Jesus is the center, focus, and message of the entire Holy Scriptures. That Holy Spirit has given you a new birth from above, and that means you see the kingdom of heaven clearly through Jesus and only through Jesus. What is heaven? An eternity with Jesus free from sin and death. What is salvation? Being connected, linked, joined to Jesus on the cross, so that your sins die with Him. What is resurrection? Jesus rising from the grave and taking all of us with Him when we go down to our graves.

It's all about Jesus, and Nicodemus missed the boat on that. We don't know if he got it after a while, it doesn't matter, but we do know what is right in front of us. You could be Nicodemus, you probably are Nicodemus some days, I certainly am. Where you just miss it. You miss what God is doing, you don't see what God is all about, whether its in your life or in the Bible or what have you. That happens, we repent of our ignorance, we repent of our sin, we repent of our blindness, and what does Jesus give us? He makes us better. He makes us not like Nicodemus, fumbling around in the dark calling Jesus a teacher. Instead, we shine in the light, we shine in His light. We don't call Jesus teacher, we call Him Lord, we call Him Savior, because He has given each one of you the Holy Spirit through water and word. Unlike Nicodemus, your eyes are opened, you are born from above, your sins are forgiven, and this barrier between God and man is torn down for you. You know more than you think you do, folks, and your instincts are better than you might believe they are. I've seen it firsthand. Why do any of us get it right? Because Jesus got it right, and Jesus gives us the Spirit to make us right.

Amen