

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
 Sunday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
 Rev. Gerry Gallant

Committed to Christ  
 Sixth Sunday of Epiphany  
 John 3:1-21

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Sing to the Lord a new song!  
**Let us make melody before our God!**

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!  
**Let us praise God's holy name together.**

How good it is to sing praises to our God;  
**For God is gracious and steadfast in mercy.**

A song of praise is always fitting,  
**For God heals the broken hearted and binds up our wounds.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God of majesty and mystery,  
 we come before you in wonder and humility.  
 Source of all that is, you are beyond our imagining,  
 astonishing us with the detail and designs within your creation.  
 Word of hope and healing,  
 you touch our lives with truth and tenderness,  
 revealing our need and our gift.  
 Spirit of purpose and possibility,  
 you move within us when we least expect it,  
 awakening our gifts, urging us to respond.  
 Receive our praise and prayer this day,  
 and prepare us to receive your Word in its wisdom and warning,  
 for we come to you through Christ our Lord,  
 trusting in his grace and truth. **Amen.**

Children's Hymn

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!  
 Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

God of life and love,  
 at this season of the year our hearts are grateful  
 for all the love which touches our lives.  
 Still we confess that we are not always shining examples of the love we long for.  
 Forgive us those times when we failed to keep our word  
 and disappointed those who love us.  
 Forgive us when we gave into our tempers and temptations  
 and disappointed your hopes for us.  
 Renew and remake us through the grace of your Son, Jesus,  
 your love made flesh. **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Through Jesus Christ forgiveness of sins  
 is proclaimed to you.  
 In Christ we have redemption through his blood,  
 the forgiveness of our trespasses,  
 according to the riches of his grace.

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.  
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
 Forever and ever. **Amen.**

**Hymn: "Pass It On"**

It only takes a spark  
 To get a fire going  
 And soon all those around  
 Can warm up in its glowing  
 That's how it is with God's love  
 Once you've experienced it  
 You spread His love to ev'ryone  
 You want to pass it on

What a wondrous time is spring  
 When all the trees are budding  
 The birds begin to sing  
 The flowers start their blooming  
 That's how it is with God's love  
 Once you've experienced it  
 You want to sing it's fresh like spring  
 You want to pass it on

I wish for you my friend  
 This happiness that I've found  
 You can depend on Him  
 It matters not where you're bound  
 I'll shout it from the mountain top  
 I want my world to know  
 The Lord of love has come to me  
 I want to pass it on

### **Responsive Reading**

#### **Jeremiah 17:5-10**

5 Thus says the LORD:

"Cursed is the man who trusts in man  
 and makes flesh his strength,  
 whose heart turns away from the LORD.

**6 He is like a shrub in the desert,  
 and shall not see any good come.**

**He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,  
 in an uninhabited salt land.**

7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,  
 whose trust is the LORD.

**8 He is like a tree planted by water,  
 that sends out its roots by the stream,  
 and does not fear when heat comes,  
 for its leaves remain green,  
 and is not anxious in the year of drought,  
 for it does not cease to bear fruit."**

9 The heart is deceitful above all things,  
 and desperately sick;  
 who can understand it?

**10 "I the LORD search the heart**

and test the mind,  
to give every man according to his ways,  
according to the fruit of his deeds.”

**Anthem (Music Ministry): “I Surrender Lord”**

**Prayer for illumination**  
**(Congregant Prepared)**

### **Scripture**

#### **John 3:1-21**

<sup>3</sup> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> 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.”

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” <sup>4</sup> 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?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ <sup>8</sup> 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.”

<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

**For God So Loved the World**

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

<sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”

## Sermon

The beauty of studying the Bible chapter by chapter is that the context of the Scripture is much easier to follow and that helps us in our understanding of the Scripture. Today, as we start into John chapter three, I believe that you will all see the value of this kind of contextual knowledge of Scripture. Too often when we quote the Bible, we do so by picking a verse we like and then interpret it in the way that benefits our own bias towards what we want it to say.

One of the most common verses in the Bible to be picked out of its place in the Scripture and interpreted in its own way John 3:16 appears in our text today. So, let's discover the context behind this all-important line of Scripture.

Remember that Jesus has just spoken on the conversion we are to experience in the Holy Spirit and the cleansing that comes after our conversion in chapter two. Also remember how chapter two concluded, speaking of those who believe of Jesus only in name, those who would not commit their lives to Jesus Christ, and how for that reason Jesus was not committed to them.

Chapter three starts with a man by the name of Nicodemus. Who is quite a remarkable man, he is a learned person, he bears a Greek name, meaning he was Greek educated. He is a pharisee, one of the conservative religious groups of the day. He was a ruler of the Jews, which means he sat on the Sanhedrin, the governing council of the Jewish people and the church of Jesus's day.

And this influential and powerful man came to see Jesus by night. There is a lot of speculation as to why he came at night. It could have been a fear of being seen with this rabbi that was causing such a stir in the community, or it could have been something as simple as him wanting to come at a time when he was more likely to get some private time with Jesus, after all Jesus was surrounded by crowds during the day.

This is our setting, two rabbis, sitting and talking together in the night air over these very critical matters of the faith.

When Nicodemus comes to Jesus, he calls him rabbi, and states that he believes that Jesus must come from God because of the signs that he is performing. To which Jesus responds in a very direct manner.

### John 3:3

**<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."**

Jesus is making a point here with Nicodemus, a point that is made not only in the New Testament, but also one that is made in the Old Testament, and one that is amplified having just read the previous chapter of the book of John. There needs to be a change in your life if you are a true believer in Jesus Christ.

He looks at Nicodemus, a man who was a highly religious man, a teacher of the Jews, a religious conservative, a man of learning and status, and tells him you need to be reborn to see the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus was probably shocked by the words of Jesus Christ. I am sure he would have agreed that there were people out there that need to be woken up to the truth of God, but he was not one of them. He was a Jew among the Jews after all.

Nicodemus would have agreed that gentiles needed to be born again, after all they were not Jews from birth. They need to be transformed, but not a man who was born a Jew.

Jesus is saying that anyone who wishes to be part of his eternal kingdom, regardless of their past, or their family connections, or their societal influence, or even their own belief in the religious standing, must be truly reborn.

This is the only form of Christianity that exists, born again Christianity, we can have hundreds upon hundreds of worldly divisions of the church in denominations, but when it comes to the Church of Jesus Christ, you are either born again or not. If you are not transformed by the Holy Spirit, if being reborn is not evident in your life in some way, then you cannot lay claim to the kingdom of heaven, because only those who are truly born again will see its glory.

That word that is translated from the Greek as 'again', can also be translated as 'from above.' So, it works doubly, emphasising the meaning of this piece of Scripture. You must be born again from above. The Holy Spirit from above must be part of your transformation, it must bring you new life. Conversion & Cleansing are needed to be born again.

Nicodemus does not understand this, so he seeks clarity.

#### **John 3:4-8**

**<sup>4</sup> 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?" <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> 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."**

A man cannot be born twice. Nicodemus is questioning how a man can be reborn when he is old.

Remember this is one rabbi speaking to another rabbi. These are two men who are supposed to be knowledgeable of the Scriptures.

Jesus is speaking from the Scriptures. He is speaking of the covenants between God and man. In his covenants across the Old Testament God had made many promises to his people, but perhaps the most important in the days of Jesus was in regards to the coming of the Messiah.

That covenant spoke of the gathering of God's people into the land of Israel, the cleansing and spiritual renewal of God's people and then finally the coming of the Messiah to rule over Israel and the entire world.

The Jewish world of Jesus's day believed that the first two aspects of this covenant had been fulfilled. After the Babylonian exile the people had been returned to the land of the ancestors, and with the rise of the pharisees there seemed to be a religious revival occurring within the Jewish nation, as people gave up progressiveness and returned to their religious roots.

So, in the minds of many people, they were only waiting for the Messiah.

Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he is wrong, that spiritual renewal of God's people had not yet come. The rebirth, being reborn by the Holy Spirit, experiencing that conversion and cleansing of God is the only form of spiritual renewal that is God approved.

Jesus confronts Nicodemus with this truth because in Nicodemus's eyes, he is already transformed. Jesus tells him directly, you actually are not.

**'You must be born again.'**

What Jesus is saying is that you do not need to change before you come to Christ. Instead, you need to be transformed by the power of the water and the spirit. Jesus is speaking from the Old Testament.

He is referencing the book of Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 36:25-27**

**<sup>25</sup> I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

This is what happens when we are converted and the cleansing in our life begins. The darkness of our sinful ways is pushed away by the Light of the Lord as he cleanses us.

Jesus is here to transform lives, to change people from who they were into who he is calling them to be, and the clearest sign of someone's commitment to Christ is change occurring in their life.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this comes from a Canadian preacher who became an evangelist in the United States in the early 1900's. His name was Harry Ironsides and he was from Toronto.

One Sunday morning he was preaching on the corner of Market and Grant Avenue in San Francisco, when a well-dressed man handed him a card that read, 'Sir, I challenge you to debate with me the question 'Agnosticism versus Christianity' in the Academy of Science Hall next Sunday afternoon at four o'clock. I will pay all expenses —."

Harry read the card aloud to those gathered around and told the man that he was very much interested in the challenge.

However, in order to prove that it was a debate worth having, he made two requests of his challenger.

First that he'll bring what was called a down-and-outer, a man who had become an outcast of society because of his addictions, a man who struggled with habits that caused the loss of health, home and family, whether a drunkard, a criminal, drug addict, it did not matter. And after hearing of the power of Agnosticism had had his life radically transformed by its power.

Second that he'll bring a woman who was a poor, wrecked, characterless outcast, a slave to sexual passions and man's corrupt living, who after hearing of the message of Agnosticism had been freed from the slavery of her passions and revolted against the life she had been living, and by doing so had once again been accepted back into society and was living a clean, virtuous and happy life because of her Agnosticism.

To which he added, 'if you will promise to bring these two people with you as examples of what Agnosticism will do, I will promise to meet you at the Hall at the hour appointed next Sunday, and I will bring with me at the very least one hundred men and women who for years lived in just such sinful degradation as I have tried to depict, but who have been gloriously saved through believing the message of the Gospel which you ridicule. I will have these men and women with me on the platform as witnesses to the miraculous saving power of Jesus Christ, and as present-day proof of the truth of the Bible.'

At which point the challenger withdrew his challenge and walked away defeated.

The truth is that anyone who is a true believer has experienced the life changing power of the Holy Spirit. They have been born again.

The problem is that for some people it is very clearly defined, they can tell you the date and time of their conversion. They know the exact moment when things begin to change. However, for many others it is not so clear, it is a gradual transformation, one is which they come to a sudden realization, sometimes years down the road, when they recognize that they are no longer the person that they used to be.

Everyone's cleansing takes a different path, and we cannot judge one another based upon our own experience or expectations. The principle of being reborn is firm and secure, but the process is up to God and God alone.



This is why Jesus tells Nicodemus that the flesh is flesh and the Spirit is Spirit. The flesh will always lead you down the path of unrighteousness and the Spirit is the only thing that can change you.

He says you may not understand it because it is like the wind, the wind goes where it wants and does what it does. You may not know where it is coming from or what it is doing but you know it is blowing.

The same is true of the work of the Holy Spirit in someone's life, you may not understand what it is doing, or why it is doing something, but the evidence of it is in their lives.

### **John 3:9-15**

**<sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

Nicodemus struggled with this understanding. Jesus tells him that he should know better, he is a teacher of the people after all. So, he speaks even more clearly. In verses 14-15 he points to what happens in the book of Numbers when the people of Israel were travelling through the wilderness, when they were being rebellious, and because of their sin God had sent serpents to bite the people.

God had told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it up on a pole and anyone who looks upon the serpent would be saved. Jesus is illustrating his own death upon the cross through the bronze serpent on the pole of the Old Testament.

Bronze a metal that was made in fire, a metal that symbolized judgement and a serpent that symbolized sin. Jesus is literally speaking of the Judgement of the sin of man that would take place in his crucifixion upon the cross for the salvation of mankind. Jesus was the embodiment of all of the sin of the world and the righteous judgement of God was cast upon him

### **John 3:16**

**<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

Jesus tells Nicodemus it is not only the Jews that God loves. God loves the world, the whole world and everyone in it. So much so that he gave his only begotten son as a sacrifice to the

world just the way that they are. God did not require them to change first, he gave his son as a sacrifice while the world was in the depths of its sin and in rebellion against Him.

‘For God so loved the world’

God’s love for the world is so strong that he was willing to put his only begotten son upon the cross to receive the wrath of his fury against sin. And that is where many people stop reading John 3:16, however it does continue.

‘that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.’

This is the belief that John was teaching us in Chapter 2. It is more than just believing that Jesus was a good moral man, that he was the son of God, that he did miracles. It is being converted, committed and cleansed by the Holy Spirit. That is the belief that is being spoken about here in John 3:16. It is trusting on, rely on and cling to Jesus Christ in our lives, the giving up of self and committing self to humbly serving the Lord.

So yes, God loves the world, but only those who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ will receive the benefits of Jesus Christ’s death upon the cross. All we have to do is raise our eyes to the man on the cross, what an amazing offer. There are no requirements, no social requirement, no financial requirements, no racial or cultural requirements, no requirements at all, ‘Whoever believes in him’ means that whoever. The choice is yours, and if you reject that gift of salvation there is only one person to blame, you.

### **John 3:17-21**

**<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”**

God wants to save the world and offers a free gift to anyone who is willing to come to God. But those who choose to reject the gift, those who choose not to believe, they are condemned.

Jesus did not come to condemn, he came to save, the gift is free to all, the sacrifice is great enough to cover the sins of every human being, ‘Whoever believes in him is saved’.

However, the consequence of the free gift of salvation is that those who refuse it are condemned. Condemned to a life of sin. Condemned to love their sin.

The truth is that many people who reject God do so not for any intellectual reasoning, or any real disbelief. The reality is that most of the people who tell you that they reject God for intellectual reasons, actually reject God for moral reasons. They do not want to give up the sin in their lives.

If people were honest, they would say that there is a sin in their life that they know that the Bible is sinful, and they do not want to submit to the authority of God's Word in their lives.

That is why they condemn themselves, because they refuse the life-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ to embrace the fleeting pleasures of this world.

Notice in verse twenty-one it says that whoever does what is true, not whoever believes what is true, but whoever does what it is true. Whoever is transformed by the Holy Spirit, whoever changes from who they were into who God is calling for them to be, they are saved.

We need to come before God and confess the truth of our own sin and trust in his sacrifice upon the cross. We need to humble ourselves before him, accept him as Lord and Saviour and commit ourselves to him, allowing the Holy Spirit to be at work changing our lives, sanctifying us in his name.

You have a new life in Jesus Christ, you leave the old man behind and embrace the new man. You do the truth in your life.

I do not ever do this, but this is a powerful bit of Scripture, and I want to take advantage of this day. I want to invite the church elders up to the front of the church.

Now I want to invite anyone else who wishes to come up and pray, especially those who are unsure of their faith.

Those who have not accepted Jesus Christ into your life I want you to do so today. Anyone who wishes to accept Jesus Christ into their lives today to stand up and come to the front and pray with us.

So, if that is you, do not be shy, do not be embarrassed, just come up and join us here and embrace Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

Let us Pray,

Give Us Faith to Overcome Our Weakness

Lord God, heavenly Father,  
in your special love and mercy

you gave us your Son  
 who became truly human  
 and died on the cross for us.  
 Pour your Holy Spirit into our hearts  
 that we may put all our trust in him,  
 just as the Centurion believed  
 that Christ would help his sick servant,  
 may we be assured  
 of the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life.  
 We have your Word:  
 "Whoever believes in me will never see death."  
 Dear Father in heaven,  
 grant that we may believe with no doubts in our hearts,  
 and remain in the faith until our last hour.  
 Almighty and eternal God,  
 mercifully look on our weaknesses,  
 and in all dangers and needs  
 defend us with your power against our enemies;  
 through Jesus Christ, your Son,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 one true God, now and forever. Amen.

**Source: Veit Dietrich, d. 1549, Epiphany 3.**

**Hymn #333: "I Sing the Almighty Power of God"**

I sing the almighty power of God  
 that made the mountains rise,  
 that spread the flowing seas abroad  
 and built the lofty skies.  
 I sing the wisdom that ordained  
 the sun to rule the day;  
 the moon shines full at Gods command,  
 and all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord,  
 that filled the earth with food;  
 God formed the creatures with a word,  
 and then pronounced them good.  
 Lord, how thy wonders are displayed,  
 where'er I turn my eyes,  
 if I survey the ground I tread,  
 or gaze upon the skies!

There's not a plant or flower below  
 but makes thy glories known,  
 and clouds arise and tempests blow  
 by order from thy throne,  
 while all that borrows life from thee  
 is ever in thy care,  
 and everywhere I could be,  
 thou, God, art present there.

### **Invitation to Offering**

### **Offering**

### **Offertory Prayer** **(Congregant Prepared)**

### **Closing Hymn #461: "Be Thou My Vision"**

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
 naught be all else to me, save that thou art,  
 thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
 waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

Riches I heed not, nor vain earthly praise,  
 thou mine inheritance, through all my days;  
 thou and thou only, the first in my heart,  
 high King of heaven, my treasure thou art!

High King of heaven, when the battle is done,  
 grant heaven's joy to me, O bright heaven's Sun;  
 heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
 still be my vision, O ruler of all.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

God of mystery and mercy,  
 We come before you today carrying hopes and dreams,  
 the burdens and blessings of our lives.  
 We bring all that is on our hearts and minds to you,  
 seeking your comfort and strength,  
 listening for your guidance,  
 grateful that you hear us when we pray.

God of life and love,  
We give you thanks that you engage us whenever we need you,  
in the midst of challenge and uncertainty.  
We pray today for all those who are fearful about their future,  
and for all who wrestle with challenges at work or at home.  
Help us face our fears and our challenges, sure of your steadfast love:

God of hope and healing,  
In Jesus Christ you confronted demons that trouble our minds  
and the pain and illness which can weigh us down.  
We pray today for all those who are facing health concerns,  
and for all who care for the suffering and those in need support.  
Surround each one with your steadfast love.

God of peace and promise,  
when we wrestle with any burden,  
your Spirit prays within us with sighs too deep for words.  
Today we pray for all those whose burdens seem too heavy to bear:  
for the victims of violence or disaster, for their friends and families...  
For those caught in despair and poverty in our own neighborhoods  
and in the forgotten corners of your world.  
Renew the strength of all facing realities beyond their control with your steadfast love.

Almighty Father, receive all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and equip us to do your  
will in this world.  
We pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. **Amen.**

### **Benediction**

The grace of Christ attends you,  
the love of God surrounds you,  
the Holy Spirit keep you  
now and forevermore.