



THE SABBATH CIRCLES HOME SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Unit Theme: Illumination of mind and heart

Lesson connected to Sunday, February 23, 2020

Today's Scripture: John 3:1-8

Key Verse: "Jesus answered him, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.'" John 3:3

Contexts of the Scripture:

- The Gospel of John is the last of the four gospels to be written. It was written near the end of the first century CE. Its authorship is uncertain but scholars agree it was written for a specific community of the early church.
- The Gospel of John understands Jesus to be a divine, cosmic figure who functions as a bridge between heaven and earth. Jesus is sent to earth to make the Father known to those ready to hear and accept his message.
- Unlike the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), John is written in an "either/or" framework. The world is black and white where the physical world is wracked by sin and evil. The heavenly world is where those who escape sin through Jesus live in bliss for eternity. Noteworthy about this perspective is the tendency of this Gospel to "other" people who do not receive the message of Jesus in a specific way. This is especially evident in how John refers to the Jewish people repeatedly as hearing and refusing the word of Jesus. This is why John is often seen as an anti-Semitic gospel.

Questions to go deeper:

- Read through the story several times to get the outline of what's happening and sketch it out on a piece of paper. How would you describe this interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus? Cordial? Antagonistic? Something else?
- Nicodemus is described as a Pharisee. This means he was a member of a Jewish sect active at that time which wanted to extend Jewish faith practices into all of life. They also believed in the oral tradition of the interpretation of Scripture which meant their understanding of Scripture would be more flexible than the other strict Jewish sect at this time, the Sadducees. Knowing this, does your thinking about why Nicodemus came to Jesus in the dark of night change? Why or why not?
- Nicodemus had difficulty understanding what Jesus meant by being "born again." He took it literally and therefore found it very confusing. Jesus gets frustrated with this because he meant being born again figuratively as a result of the action of the Spirit. How is this an example of the "either/or" framework of John as described in the context point above? Can you understand the confusion of both of them? Why or why not?
- How do you understand "born again" as a descriptor for being a Christian?

Activity possibilities:

- **Family activities:**

- Where would this fall on the bible timeline? Hint: Check out the context info above!
- Pull out some family photos of everyone's baptisms and even Confirmations, if those are available. Talk about baptism and confirmation as bridges into a deeper life of faith – one way of being “born again” or transformed by faith into a person with a deeper understanding of what it means to be a Christian – one who follows Jesus.
- In this story of Nicodemus, and in other biblical stories as well, the wind is often a symbol of the Spirit of God moving in the world. Talk about a time when you have experienced the wind in a memorable way. Create a family storyboard to remember and illustrate the experience. Looking back on that experience, how might God have been speaking to you all in that moment?

- **Younger children activities:**

- Check out this video for making your own pinwheel that spins:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoRugzrpgv8>
When finished, blow on the windmill to make it move. Say a prayer:
God bless my family and God bless me. Let Jesus' Spirit guide us wherever we may be!

- **Older children and youth activities:**

- Work through the other activities explained above.
- Check out this video on the story of Nicodemus:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbBmpaDBizA>

This video tells more of the story than we are covering in this lesson. Does the extra material included help you to understand this story better? Why or why not?

Remember, Rev. Ruth is always happy to answer your questions and help you find more information on anything in the Bible that interests you! Catch up with her through the church or come to the Savoy Bookstore and Café any Thursday afternoon between 2-4pm.