

## **ST AIDAN'S UNITING CHURCH**

**SUNDAY 7 JUNE 2009**

**Rev. Richard Golding**

**Romans 8: 12-17; John 3: 1-17**

### **“Body, Mind and Spirit”**

Starting again is never easy. There is so much to lose. There are the systems that are learned that have to be unlearned. There is the time factor in having to begin again a new course and learn new approaches. The old hangs onto us like bark to a tree, unless the season is right and we are forced by design to peel off the old and cope with the new.

At the Bundoora Uniting church Manse, outside the front and back doors, there were gums that every year peeled off bark like you have never seen. It could be inches thick if not raked up daily. Sometimes, seeking to hurry up the process, I would peel off other bark still clinging to the tree. Some areas unready, would tear and bleed, oozing sap to heal the premature discarding of the old in preparation for the new.

Nicodemus was in a similar situation to the illustration of the tree. He knew that Jesus was a great teacher and his learning compelled him to make contact with him.

Nicodemus in his own right was a great teacher, one of the seventy priests (Sadducees), and scribes (Pharisees), together with high positioned lay people who under the High Priest were the Jewish governing body. There is a reluctance to venture out to seek something new, especially if it might undermine all previous ways of looking at things.

It takes courage to step out and lay oneself open to being seen as of limited perception of what is right.

The great teacher Nicodemus did just that. He acknowledged Jesus as a great teacher and that his words and deeds attested to this fact. But to have his right as a teacher questioned was a hard blow. And to be hit with a statement that he could not comprehend basic religious concepts even worse.

The one thing I feared in an oral examination as part of the Bachelor of Theology exam was to be hit with a question or statement I could not understand. That would make my position precarious especially in ensuing clarifying questions or statement by the examiner as to what I should have comprehended.

Poor Nicodemus was floundering from the first. Even his understanding of the sources of his knowledge was in question. Had he not seen another stream of Old Testament prophecy and statement about the process of a spiritual turn-around?

To illustrate, to help our understanding further: I remember my tutor taking me through a maths equation I had done as homework and his explanation of where my errors were made in the process. This information for my mind became so compounded till I was lost in the explanation. He was a wise tutor and he said to me, ‘Let us start again from the beginning.’

I had to put aside that which I had applied to the problem in order to hear the steps the teacher saw as necessary. This was no easy task for my mind was saying, ‘But that way I have used before, why not now?’ But new strategies because of the complexities of the problems were necessary. I was

taught and perceived a better way.

Such was the case with Nicodemus. Hear how he shows his puzzlement: 'How can a man be born again when he is old? And in verse 9, 'How can this be?'

I must say that my tutor was much more gentle with me than Jesus was with Nicodemus. But this was Jesus talking to a teacher, better understanding would be expected. It is clear in the reading that there is an entirely new factor in the equation to the means of entering the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus was applying the human faculties alone and the human frame of reference alone to the process. Jesus was saying, 'Let us start again and especially now that the complexity of the problem is such that it requires another factor in the answering of it.' Jesus adds a new spiritual factor to answer the question of 'How to know God's Kingly rule.' A new spiritual factor comes into the equation.

It is not that there is nothing spiritual about the Jewish religion, there was; but as in Christianity there is always the danger of bypassing it and using only measurement of the physical and mental to formulate religious parameters for life. Certainly, we feel more in control if we can make our Christian faith cerebral and intellectual rather than joining these to the spiritual.

Nicodemus' responses were physically and mentally based in response to the statement of Jesus about how one enters the womb for a second time. Jesus, aware of this problem, becomes both clear and insistent, stating the fact three times. He describes the spirit as wind; both in Greek are the same word, '*pneuma*'. The wind's direction is elusive but it is a powerful force. This new process is a God oriented salvation, a turning, a starting afresh. For Jesus, it is as necessary as breathing is to life. It is the third equation added to the physical and mental aspects of our person that gives continuity to life, both in this world and in the next.

Jesus gives an example of a life giving experience of Moses who asked people, bitten by poisonous snakes, to look up at a bronze serpent raised on a pole and they would be saved. We in our journey of faith must ever remind ourselves to look upward, not only at the human and the ordinary, the physical and the mental aspects of our being.

John, in hindsight saw that those who focussed with mental and spiritual intent who were seeking eternal life were to find answers in looking towards the risen Jesus. We too, are to look up to Jesus daily and call upon him for salvation.

In the last two verses of this morning's reading Jesus emphasises that this is part of the Father's plan. It is new in that it is Jesus who is the spiritual factor necessary in solving the problem of entering into eternal life. It is his life, death and resurrection which is the pivotal point in solving the equation of life and death and its successful outcome.

As we have journeyed through Easter, let us look to our lives to make sure that our religious experience is more than a Nicodemus one. Let us note whether or not there are three factors working in our equation for life and eternal life; the physical, mental and spiritual. In our honest answer we are to look upwards to Jesus, asking him for an endorsement of the rebirth that only he, together with our true intent, can grant and continue to grant in order that we might have eternal life.