

TUESDAY DEVOTION - GATEKEEPERS WORKCAMP 2018

John 3:1-10, 16-17: Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Nicodemus was probably not very good at change. As a Pharisee, it was his job to maintain the status quo, to protect tradition and resist change. He had heard how Jesus was teaching and healing, and he was curious. But Nicodemus came to see Jesus under the cover of night because it was risky for him to associate with someone like Jesus who was shaking things up and challenging the religious hierarchy. What Jesus said was so shocking Nicodemus couldn't understand it: In order to see the kingdom of God, you have to change completely. This kind of change is so radical, Jesus used a surprising metaphor to describe it: This change is as if you have been reborn!

Change is hard. The kind of spiritual change required to become a follower of Jesus means recognizing and admitting we need to change and giving up our old selves. The metaphor of rebirth gives us an indication of how complete and radical a change this is.

When we talk about the kind of change that happens in us when we become followers of Jesus, we use words like confession, repentance, humility, and grace. It can sound pretty scary, but it really just means recognizing that we sin and can never be perfect on our own; confessing our sins and striving to live by God's commandments; being humble enough to realize we cannot live up to God's goodness without God's love and mercy, which he has offered through Jesus; and accepting the gift of God's amazing grace for us. When we follow Jesus, we change from the inside out, but we realize that the change happening in us is not because of anything we can do or control. We are reborn, remade in Jesus' image, by the grace and mercy of God. It is a mystery we can't fully explain and a gift we don't deserve, but God offers us this gift because we are God's children and God loves us with infinite and unfailing love. Thanks be to God!

*Why would it be hard for someone like Nicodemus to change? *Why is it hard for us to change? *Why do you think Jesus used a metaphor like being reborn to describe the spiritual changes that happen when we become followers of Jesus? *What kinds of changes happen in our lives when we become followers of Jesus?

In many ways, Gatekeepers is about embracing change and learning to give up control. Although we will have a tremendous sense of accomplishment when we are done, we will also find out that there is still much for us to learn. We will get our hands dirty and work alongside people who are different from us. We will learn that there are some things we cannot do on our own and that we need to depend on one another to accomplish worthwhile tasks. We will learn that being obedient to God means working for change and allowing God to change us. Pray that God will help you to learn humility and be open to learning and changing, Pray that your heart will be open to receiving God's gift of grace and forgiveness, seeing yourself and others as children of God, and pray that in all things, you will learn to follow Jesus' example of humility and service. (Ask someone to close in prayer.)