

6/7/2009

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Heavenly Father, you sent your Word to bring us truth and your Spirit to make us holy. Through them we come to know the mystery of your life. Help us to worship you, one God in three persons, by proclaiming and living our faith in you. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Isaiah 6:1-8

(Isaiah sees a vision of God's throne in heaven.)

1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

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

THE SECOND LESSON Acts 2:14a, 22-36 *(Peter addresses the crowd on Pentecost.)*

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:

22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

25 David said about him: "'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, 27 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'"

29 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has

received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. 34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand 35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

THE GOSPEL LESSON

John 3:1-17 (*The Father gave His Son out of love for the world.*)

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." 4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "**I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.** 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' **8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.**"

9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-- the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to SAVE the world through him.

THE SERMON

"Abundant Blessings from a Mysterious God"

John 3

INTRO - In Alaska we have been faced with a question, a challenge, a mystery if you will, for the last number of years. A large majority of Alaskans have been in favor of a new pipeline to bring natural gas to the market. Many have worked on this problem, including engineers who have

suggested ways to get this accomplished, economists, government officials, and if it ever happens craftsmen who will put the project together. However, for some reason the mystery remains. The pipeline is suggested and agreed about by as large a majority as you can get in a state. People from many disciplines have worked on the project. But, the project has not begun, and there is no gas flowing to the market. You might say, it's a mystery!!

I. One of the greatest mysteries Christians face in life is, "How can people be brought to faith?"

- A. If there was ever a difficult case it seems to be the character in our lesson for today.
 - 1. Nicodemus was not only a Jew, he was one of the religious leaders of the Jews. We know from other places in the Bible that Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council that ruled all of Israel.
 - 2. The Jews seemed skeptical of prophets as a rule anyway. Most were rejected by the Jews. But the religious leaders were those who doubted Jesus, challenged Jesus, tried to trick and trap Jesus, and killed him. And, Nicodemus was a leader of the leaders.
 - 3. And look when Nicodemus actually came to visit Jesus. He came at night. Obviously he did not want others to even know he was there.
- B. There are many mysteries in our relationship with God.
 - 1. Many of us have friends and relatives who do not know, or understand, or believe in Jesus. This too can be a mystery. How can we bring them to faith? How can we help them to know God's love, or trust God's love, or live for the Lord? Some have tried just sharing. Some have tried arguing, or convincing. Some have tried praying. And still, some of those WE wish would believe still do not.
 - 2. But, let's not forget what may be the greatest faith mystery, if we are honest. Better than almost anyone, we know our own doubts, our own fears, our own dark places. 2. How did God work through our selfishness, our sinful nature, our doubting heart, and bring each of us to begin trusting and hoping in Him?
- C. How about the mystery of how God answers prayer? Why there is sin? Why people suffer?

II. So back to the Alaska gas pipeline? Which discipline is the one that can best open the pipeline. Is it government? Or, will economists find the key? Or, will it be a trade union, or an oil company? Or will they all have to work together?

- A. Look how many ways God worked in Nicodemus' life.
 - 1. Verse 16 says of God the Father that, **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,**. So, in order to reach out to Nicodemus the Father acted in loving, in giving, and in sending.
 - 2. We are told How Jesus, the Son, worked to save Nicodemus.
 - A. Verses 14 and 15 say that Jesus sacrificed himself. **14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.**
 - B. Verse 17 says that Jesus saved Nicodemus **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him**
 - 3. And we are told that the Holy Spirit works mysteriously, through baptism and God's Word, to create faith.

A. Verse 5 says, **"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**

B. Verse 8 says, **8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."**

4. The pipeline has not started, but in John 19 we hear about Nicodemus again. **38 Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. 39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.**

B. So, what has God done to save you?

1. The Father sent His Son for you.

2. Jesus lived for you, died for you, rose for you.

3. The Holy Spirit called you to faith.

4. God works in baptism to forgive and create and strengthen faith, today in a Tiana Rogers.

5. God works in the Lord's supper to forgive and strengthen.

6. Every day God is with you, by His Word and Spirit, His personal presence.

7. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has done all this and more to save you.

C. God works in so many ways in our lives, so mysteriously, blessing us so abundantly, that it is difficult to count how many ways He has worked. How many other ways has God blessed you? About a month and a half ago we were told that Kathy's mom would not make it, again. On April 21 we were called to the hospital. I knew we were going to be out of town. I began praying, "Lord, it is your time. But, please don't let us be out of town." I have a picture from May 3 when Alice was present for the baptism of her great grand baby. God took her on Friday after that, and we were able to bury her while outside. Imagine the working of God to take a time of fear, and turn it into a celebration of love and faith!

III. Today we honor the graduates at St. John. We have many graduating from High School, and some from college. They are beginning new chapters in life, with challenges, opportunities, fear and joy. Often there are questions about whether to go forward with a challenge or a task. Will I fail or succeed? Should I try?

A. This actually is a picture of what Christians face every day.

1. Do we accept the challenge?

2. Do we risk a job for the Lord?

B. God blesses us in so many ways, so abundantly, with His love and presence, His power and forgiveness, in ways mysteriously beyond our understanding, why should we be afraid to go forward for the Lord? He is with us today, and will be with us through life's challenges. Let's take the challenges and risk failing to serve the Lord.

He is there to bless, mysteriously, abundantly.

CONCLUSION for over 3 ½ years I've been praying for Kristin Kopperud to get a heart. Recently I was arguing with God. "God, why don't you get her a heart?" But, God knew why the delay. He got her just the right heart, a perfect match. She is doing so well. Imagine the mysterious powerful working of God to accomplish this blessing.

Whatever you face, with the Lord, know that God the Father, God the Son, and God

the Holy Spirit are with you, blessing you, mysteriously, powerfully, and lovingly. Go forward in their blessing.

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GRIEVING

ILL Ron McNeese
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 Dave Miranda
 Pat Mills Mary C.'s mom
 Mary Richards
 all on our hearts

TROUBLE families
 Country
 Serving
 Peter
 Kathryn
 Zach