

**By Ourselves We Cannot Begin Anew or See Anew, But the Spirit of God Is Hovering and Blowing  
Across Our Lives, Not to Condemn Us But to Save Us and Make All Things New: A Rebirth**

"It's late in the evening on the Mount of Olives," the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said as he began his sermon Sunday. "Jesus sits by a fire, and the only sound to be heard is the sound of embers cracking and popping. He reflects on how angry he has just made the Pharisees and religious leaders during his encounter with the money changers in the temple. . . The look in their eyes was unmistakable. It was a look that wanted blood, that wanted death. Tonight may be one of those nights where one sleeps incredibly light.

"And then a sound," he continued. "The sound of sandals crunching along the dirt path. Jesus braces himself. There, stepping forth from the shadows, is a man—not a mob, but a man. At this very moment this man's friends are plotting Jesus' death, but this religious leader, this Pharisee, has come alone. He has come alone in the heart of the night to have a conversation with Jesus. His name was Nicodemus. . . He comes to Jesus, looking for Jesus to say something that might take away his doubts and bolster his sagging spiritual confidence.

"But Jesus is not exactly cooperative. And the response Nicodemus gets is, 'Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.' Instead of affirmation, he hears, 'Unless you are born *from above*, the Kingdom of God is not accessible to you.'

"Well, there's a shock to the system! . . . Nicodemus needs a new birth, but he isn't sure what a new birth even is!

"We can empathize with Nicodemus. We need a new start, a new beginning, something more than what we have or even what we understand, but we're not sure how we are supposed to make it happen. . . We hunger for an experience of God that goes beyond mere logic and rational understanding. We know we need a new birth, but we take these words of Jesus about being born again, and we make formulaic that (p. 2→)



"The Samaritan Woman at the Well", by Annibale Carracci, *Pinacoteca di Brera*, Milan. © Web Gallery of Art. As we will hear in the Gospel lesson Sunday, "People soon become thirsty again after drinking this water," Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, "but the water I give them . . . becomes a perpetual spring within them, giving them eternal life." In the O.T. lesson, Moses will strike the rock and water will gush forth, in response to the Israelites' complaints of thirst in the wilderness. "Is the Lord going to take care of us or not?" the people asked. We'll hear Paul respond in the Epistle lesson, "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure."

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Sundays

10:00 a.m.: Word & Table service

11:30 a.m.: Refreshments, conversation

11:45 a.m.: Post-service discussion

6:00 p.m.: (First Sundays only) Evensong

**Tuesday and Thursday, 6:30 p.m.: Lenten Evening Prayers**

**Readings, 2/24:** Ex. 17:1-7; Ps. 95; Rom. 5:1-11; John 4:5-42. **3/2, 10 a.m.:** 1 Sam. 16:1-13; Ps. 23; Eph. 5:1-14; John 9:1-13, 28-38. **3/2, 6 p.m.:** Ps. 19; Gen. 48:8-22; Rom. 8:11-25.

**Prayer Emphases:** Mexico; Lutheran Church (Wis. Synod); St. James Church, NYC, and the Rev. Brenda Husson; Wycliffe Bible Translators; parishioners on Chestnut Drive.

(**Sermon, cont'd.**) which cannot be reduced to a formula. This also leaves us frustrated. . . We cannot give birth to ourselves. This exasperated Nicodemus, but Jesus told him . . . God can give new birth through the Spirit. . . The Spirit of God is like the wind, blowing through creation and blowing across human lives. . . They can merely watch and listen, and marvel. . . I think Nicodemus was on a journey, a journey where Jesus encountered him and invited him to move from 'belief' to 'belief in', an encounter where Jesus invited him to step out, to say yes, to ride the wind, to allow the Spirit of God to do for him what he could never do for himself: to be born anew, and to live. As we come to the Lord's Table . . . if we listen carefully . . . we will discern the wind of the Spirit of God," come to save us, blowing across our lives and making all things new.