

Text: John 3:1-17

Theme: From Knowledge to Faith

There are many people who know a lot about our Christian faith. Even many people who aren't Christians have heard about holidays like Christmas and Easter. They might even know the words to a few Christian Christmas Carols. They would even agree that there are a lot of good things with regard to Christianity.

A good example of this was the video that we watched the last two weeks in Bible class. It was a very good description of the Gospel stories and the places where Jesus walked. I found it to be extremely interesting, but even though the doctors and university professors seemed to be very knowledgeable about Christianity, you could not tell whether they actually believed it.

The story of Nicodemus' visit to Jesus is about the movement from knowledge about Jesus to faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior.

I. Nicodemus knew that Jesus was from God.

Jesus' miracles convinced him of this. John only records a few miracles up to this point. Jesus changed the water into wine. Then He and His disciples went to Jerusalem where He cleansed the temple. While He was there, John writes that He did many miraculous signs, but John doesn't tell what they are. After Jesus changed the water into wine, it said that the disciples believed in Him, but that was not the case with the members of the Sanhedrin like Nicodemus. He says that they knew that He was a teacher from God, but that knowledge was different from believing in Jesus.

There were many such people in the Bible. They were people who knew that Israel's God was the true God, but they did not believe that God was for them. Some of the best examples of this were in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. When God delivered Daniel from the lions' den or the three men from the fiery furnace, the kings acknowledged that God has saved His people, and that the God of Israel was the true God, but they never came to faith that Daniel's God could be their God. That is the kind of faith of which James writes, "*You believe that there is one God, Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.*" (Jm 2:19) This kind of knowledge would cause the Sanhedrin to reject Jesus. It was after Jesus' greatest miracle, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, when they finally determined that they had to do away with Jesus before everyone believed in Him. Such knowledge without faith only makes us enemies of Christ in the end.

How are we tempted to just know that Jesus is from God? Our Christian teaching can become more of a subject that we study than something we believe in. A lot of people know a lot of Bible stories. They might have even gone to Christian Schools. They will even tell you that it's all true, but they don't believe that Jesus is for them. We might even witness a great example of faith in a loved one, but not realize that this same faith could be the bedrock of our lives. It is very sad to know the facts about who Jesus is and to accept those facts as true, but that is as far as we go. Such knowledge about Jesus is meaningless if it is not accompanied by faith. It is so important that we move from knowledge to faith in Christ. It is actually a great tragedy if we do not go beyond that.

II. Faith is believing that God is for me in Christ.

This can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit. God the Father sent His only Son to save the world. Jesus was lifted up on the cross to save us. It is the Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts to believe that Jesus gave His life and rose from the dead for me. Jesus speaks of being “born of the Spirit.” This is the work of the Spirit to bring us to believe in Christ.

That “for me” is the essence of Christian faith. It is trusting that when Jesus died on that cross, He did so for the forgiveness of my sins. Jesus speaks of that in the most famous verse of the Bible, *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever **believes in Him** will not perish, but have eternal life.”* Faith in Christ brings us from death to life. It gives us a rebirth as the children of God.

Luther makes this point in the last section on Holy Communion in the Small Catechism. He writes, **“He who has faith in these words, “given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins is worthy and well prepared, because the words “for you” require all hearts to believe.** Faith in Jesus grasps all of the gifts that He came to bring to us.

Throughout our lives we are driven to this sweet Gospel. The Gospel is not that Jesus died on the cross. It’s that He did it “for you.” As Christians it is our desire to have our children baptized in His name as soon as possible. We want to raise them to know that their faith in Christ is the greatest treasure that they have. We love to hear the Gospel, and receive our Lord’s body and blood at this altar which were given and shed for us. Anything that reminds us of God’s great love for us in Christ are the sweetest words that we can hear.

Throughout this story Jesus is calling Nicodemus to believe in Him. He is calling this man to move from knowledge to faith that Jesus gave His life for the forgiveness of His sins. We know that Nicodemus was there when Jesus was on the cross. He must have thought of those words of Jesus, *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life.”* Nicodemus looked at Jesus and believed. He was emboldened to ask for Jesus’ body and give it a proper burial until the resurrection. May God give each one of us that same faith, that we may cross know knowledge to faith that Christ gave His life for me, that I may be His own now and forever.

Amen.

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Prayer of the Church

Second Sunday in Lent

8 March 2020

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your gift of faith through the Holy Spirit, that we are reborn as your children through faith that Jesus gave His life on the cross for me. We thank you for the gift of salvation and the gift of faith and pray that you will always keep our hearts faithful to our Savior.

Gracious Father, through Your holy Word of the Gospel, You have called our faith into existence and given life to us who were dead in sin. Grant that all pastors would faithfully preach that we are righteous before You through faith alone and not by works of the Law. Sustain and strengthen all pastors and their hearers through Your blessed Word of forgiveness.

Almighty God, You have set in place all earthly authorities to provide for peace and justice. Grant them to be faithful and diligent in their positions, that they may work to protect the weak and vulnerable. Bless all who labor to provide protection, including those in our armed services as well as local safety personnel.

O Lord, we need godly schools to provide a solid foundation for those who learn, that they may learn to live according to Your Word. Bless all schools, colleges and seminaries of the Church, that they may be places where sound doctrine is taught and the life of faith in Christ is nurtured.

Heavenly Father, You graciously provide for all our needs of body and soul. We pray for all those who suffer any kind of affliction, whether spiritual, mental or physical [*including _____*]. Grant healing and recovery according to Your will.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**