

John 3:1-17

3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jewish Nation in that time.

3:2 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."

3:3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

3:4 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?"

3:5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

3:6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.

3:7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'

3:8 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."

3:9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

3:10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

3:11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony.

3:12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

3:14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

3:15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

3:16 "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.

3:17 "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.

3:18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

3:19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

3:20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

3:21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,
then walks with us silently out of the night.
These are the words we dimly hear:
You, sent out beyond your recall,
go to the limits of your longing.
Embody me.
Flare up like a flame
and make big shadows I can move in.
Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror.
Just keep going. No feeling is final.
Don't let yourself lose me.
Nearby is the country they call life.
You will know it by its seriousness.
Give me your hand.

Go to the Limits of Your Longing **Written by [Rainer Maria Rilke](#)**
Translated and read by Joanna Macy
Book of Hours, I 59

The writer of the Ephesians, a highly contested topic, used a phrase that really caught my attention during my sacred reading this week.

"We are the poetic act of God, created for goodness!" We are poetry.

On Tuesday mornings, I slow down my reading of the lectionary texts. Candle is lit, Rooibos tea in hand, I spend time in quiet, and then read the texts through each three times.

Lectio Divina – a patient slowed down read, allowing more than our minds to be engaged, engaging our heart and our body. Slowly, reading, slowly resting, slowly breathing it in. A practice actually developed by the desert mothers.

We give up our idea that we know what is in the reading, we see it not as a map but as a doorway into the very presence of God. This practice cultivates in us an ability to be surprised by the Spirit and to lay our assumptions down.

The Lectio process for me goes something like this...

1. The first time I read a scripture, I listen for a word, a phrase or an image.
2. The second time, I listen for how that word, phrase or image connect with me personally – my story, my experience, my memories.
3. The third time, I listen for what that word, phrase or image is inviting us into as a community at St Catherine's.

And when I get antsy or impatient, it is often a sure sign there is something in there for me that my ego just doesn't want to hear. The restlessness I feel, the resistance.

So, the discipline is to wait with it, patiently.

And if I get really fidgety, sometimes I need to change posture or move around, or even take the reading with me on a morning walk. Staying with it. Just staying with it.

So this week, the phrase was: I was reading a new version of Ephesians 2.

And verse 10 leapt off the page:

“We are the poetic act of God, created for goodness!”

We are poetry.

And I remembered a Scottish woman, named Grace Forsyth, who lived in a Seniors Home down the street from me. I would walk over regularly and we would read poetry. She was like a 'Desert Mother to me'. One who gave wisdom to me when I felt lost.

Poetry held out hope for me as a young girl, it held together complexity that I couldn't resolve in my mind, but would feel deeply.

And in the beautiful words of Mary Oliver: “Poetry is a life-cherishing force. For poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry.”

From Mary Oliver, A Poetry Handbook

And as I reread this beautiful line in Ephesians again:

“We are the poetic act of God, created for goodness!”

I was invited to ponder, And I invite you to reflect on this also:

- When are we most alive with that life cherishing force?
 - When does that fire within us spark?
 - When do we sense internally that we are home?
 - When do we feel emotionally content, nicely filled on the bread of heaven?
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Created for goodness.

When did Christianity take the turn to become what we do and what we don't do? Mired in rules. When did we sway from the movement toward flourishing?

When we read in John's gospel that God so Loved the World that God gives us life. Just where we are.

This Lenten season we are leaning into patience.

Patience is the mother of expectation.

Simone Weil wrote: "Waiting patiently in expectation is the foundation of the spiritual life."

This long-suffering or patience can be compared to the birth pangs of a woman's labour.

What seems a hindrance becomes a way, what seems an obstacle becomes a door; what seems a misfit becomes a cornerstone, what seems like death gives way to life.

Stay, wait, be with what is all around you. Acknowledge it, Let it be and even welcome it!

And this is part of the message of Amma Theodora, a desert Mother of the 4th century in Egypt. When we want to say: 'I will go away from here.'

Beware all we struggle with goes before us and waits for us in the next place we plan to go!

- If I struggle with perfectionism here – I'll struggle with it there.
- If I struggle with a certain personality type – O my a person just like that will be waiting there for me also.
- If I struggle with feeling like a victim here – there will be the same challenges waiting for me in the new place.

Along similar lines: Amma Syncletica, who we learnt about last Tuesday in our Desert Mothers course with Heather Luccock and Linda Robertson, said:

"If you find yourself in a monastery do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or nun grows cold and their faith dies, when they go from one place to another".

This doesn't mean we should never go anywhere, the Christian tradition offers many stories of those who find God on the Journey. Rather the challenge is to examine what prompts our perpetual motion. Is it distraction? Is it fear? Is it boredom? Is it resistance? Is it restlessness?

Stability is not just a physical remaining in one place. In learning to pay attention to what is before us rather than looking for something more appealing, we come to know part of ourselves that we could never enter otherwise.

Jan Richardson: In the Sanctuary of Women

Like staying with a scripture text or sacred word or poem.
We are also invited to stay with what might be challenging for us, what is complex.
Patiently waiting.

“To let our roots go deep and deeper still in the Holy Ground of God”

A blessing by Jan Richardson.