

John 3:1-17

Lent 2; March 5/6, 2023

His name was Paul. He lived in a small town in the Pacific Northwest some years ago. He was just a little boy when his family became the proud owners of one of the first telephones in the neighborhood. It was one of those wooden boxes attached to the wall with the shiny receiver hanging on the side of the box, and the mouthpiece attached to the front. Young Paul listened with fascination as his mom and dad used the phone. He discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device called a telephone lived an amazing person.

Her name was "Information Please". There was nothing she did not know. *Information Please* could supply anybody's number and the correct time! Paul's first personal experience with "Information Please" came one day when he was home alone, and he whacked his finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible, and he didn't know what to do. But then he thought of the telephone. Quickly, he pulled a footstool up to the phone, climbed up, unhooked the receiver, held it to his ear and said: "Information Please" into the mouthpiece. There was a click or two and then a small clear voice spoke: "Information." "I hurt my finger," Paul cried into the phone. "Isn't your mother home?" "Nobody's home but me," Paul cried. "Are you bleeding?" "No," Paul said. "I hit my finger with the hammer, and it hurts." "Can you open your ice-box?" "Yes." "Then go get some ice and hold it to your finger." Paul did and it helped a lot. After that Paul called "Information Please" for everything. She helped him with his geography and his math. She taught him how to spell the word "fix." She told him what to feed his pet chipmunk. "Information Please" always seemed to have the right answer.

On one night in ancient Jerusalem, a man named Nicodemus, came looking for someone to get the right answers to the questions that he had. Nicodemus was a religious, legal expert. He was educated. He was responsible for teaching the Law to the people of his day. But Nicodemus was a smart man. But this man named "Jesus" had caught his attention. He started to pay close attention to Jesus. He watched him perform miraculous signs. He listened as Jesus taught the people with authority. He recognized that Jesus was no ordinary man from Nazareth. He wanted more information from Jesus himself. But he also knew that many of the Pharisees wanted Jesus dead. So, he needed to be careful. **"He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God."**

What Jesus spoke next puzzled him. "Jesus replied, **"Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."** "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, **"Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."**

At this point Jesus appears to have become a little impatient. **"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"** However, Jesus wasn't impatient with him. He knew what Nicodemus was looking for. It's as if Jesus was saying, "Ok, Nicodemus, I am going to make this very simple for you." John tells us: **"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."**

You see Nicodemus understood what it meant to be a good Jew. He was probably from a wealthy, distinguished and highly respected family. He was a Pharisee. He had taken a pledge that he would dedicate his life to observe every detail of the law. The Scribes worked out the regulations. The Pharisees would dedicate their lives to keep them to the nth degree. In addition, Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the "Supreme Court" of the Jews. The Sanhedrin had only 70 members and Nicodemus was one of them. The Sanhedrin had religious authority over every Jew in the world; and one of its primary duties was to examine and deal with anyone suspected of being a false prophet. Therefore, this whole idea that God would save him; that he didn't have to earn it by his works; it seemed so simple. It seemed almost too good to be true. Yet, that was Jesus' point. It was going to take a big change to come into the kingdom of God. That change would happen through the waters of baptism. Through baptism we **"are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."** Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that he was going to change everything for Nicodemus. He would pay the price for sin.

One day when Paul called *"Information Please,"* his pet canary had died. She listened to his grief tenderly and then said: *"Paul, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in."* Those words that she spoke brought comfort to Paul. He wasn't quite sure why, but there was something comforting in them. When Paul was nine years old, he moved with his family to Boston. and as the years passed he missed *"Information Please"* very much. Some years later as Paul was on his way out west to go to college, his plane landed in Seattle. He dialed his hometown operator and said, *"Information Please."* When *"Information Please"* answered, he recognized the voice. Paul hadn't planned this, but suddenly he blurted out: *"Could you please tell me how to spell the word 'fix'?"* There was a long pause. Then came the soft answer: *"I guess your finger must be all healed by now."* Paul laughed. *"So it's really still you. Do you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time when I was a little boy?"* *"I wonder,"* she said, *"if you know how much your calls meant to me! I never had any children and I used to look forward to your calls so much."*

He told her that he could call her again when he was back in the area. *"Please do,"* she said, *"just ask for Sally."* Three months later, Paul was back in Seattle. This time a different voice answered. He asked for Sally. *"Are you a friend?"* the operator asked. *"Yes, a very good and old friend."* Paul answered. *"Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you this,"* she said. *"Sally had been working part time the last few years because she was sick. She died 5 weeks ago."* Before he could hang up, the operator said: *"Wait a minute. Did you say your name was Paul?"* *"Yes."* *"Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down in case you called. Let me read it to you. It says: 'When Paul calls, tell him that I still say: there are other worlds to sing in.' He will know what I mean."* Paul thanked her and hung up and he did know what Sally meant.

"There are other worlds to sing in." Perhaps, those words come close to what Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know that night. Jesus was telling him that he didn't need to stay being the person he had been. He wanted Nicodemus to know that he had something much better for him. That promise of John 3:16 would enable Nicodemus to *sing in* what ever what going on in his life. Trust that promise of Jesus that will enable us to sing in another world for eternity. **"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."** Amen.