

## ***The Courage to Trust***

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Today's scripture readings hint at new beginnings. But new beginnings rarely come without some fear welling up inside of us as we feel the call to move.

My uncle Bill, my dad's brother, was an Anglican priest. I say was, because he passed away a number of years ago. Uncle Bill, Father Bill, was wonderful human. He was extremely inquisitive, and had an encyclopedic knowledge the Montreal Canadians history, and, taught me about their predecessor, the Montreal Maroons. He was also a great listener. He was also bilingual; at one time he led worship on the New Brunswick side of the border in English, then an hour later he led the same worship in French language on the Quebec side.

What an amazing man. So, it seems funny how anxious he was to travel. You see, it was an epic drama that would begin late at night as he packed his car in the dark and traveled through the night to avoid traffic. Of course, no visit from Uncle Bill was complete without my mother finding his essential items left around our house as he left our house in the wee hours of the morning before we awakened.

Moving, changing, "being born from above" as Jesus tells Nicodemus, is never easy. Even for adventurers among us. That image of Nicodemus meeting Jesus in the night captures the fear that even the brilliant among us bring when we don't have answers. Nicodemus, the teacher, the scholar, does not understand. It's like I find myself in a conversation over coffee about the Bible when a person raises the topic of that really interesting new Bible translation.

"What do you think, Rev. Dave?"

"Well, yes, really interesting. That is a good word for it." Says I, as I make a mental note to myself, check out that translation on Google later. I had never heard of that new translation.

Give credit to Nicodemus – he is willing to express his lack of understanding. To be "born from above"; in ancient time, that was part of a two-tiered universe as the writer of John's Gospel would have understood it. People on the bottom level – earth – are in the midst of sin and evil. Up there [gesture] is heaven. That is where our head and heart need to be, according to Plato.

That might seem strange to some of us, but to others of us, not so strange at all. We spend a lot of time in our society trying to get *higher*, trying to find a better perspective from high up. We place great stock in people who are cerebral, visionary, but, too much in the head and no heart becomes detached, aloof. Here on earth, muddling in everyday life, it is not easy to focus on God. When we are trying to pay the bills, to put the kids through college, find a job that is fulfilling, recuperating from the hip replacement in retired life.

The meaning of being "born from above" for each of us differs among us greatly. I don't think that Jesus in John's Gospel means, here, though, to indulge our fears of living out our escapist attitudes. Escapism might be to choose to not live fully, avoid relationships

and situations that might cause us to make mistakes, see things intellectually alone rather than connect with our hearts, our emotions, our vulnerabilities.

We are wonderfully, and, at times, frustratingly, embodied. <sup>1</sup> Being on a hill or mountaintop can be exhilarating, but can we agree that the majority of our life is spent in the real world, its trials and tribulations, temptations and sensations – times of stability and times when we have to move?

As I muddle through my journey through life, I don't know about you, but I witness news, and experience first hand, situations elicit in me anxiety and fear. There seem more stories and circumstances now than ever before like that. But historians will tell us that our modern woes are only variations on a theme of crisis and suffering that has played out through human history. That is small comfort for us, telling us that our ancestors had it worse.

The challenge for us, then, is to live and love with courage. I'm still learning this spiritual practice. The courage to witness tragedy, and injustice, and feel our hearts broken. To lean into compassion, rather than resorting to cynical attitudes. The courage to be human – flawed as we are, wonderfully and fearfully made, not at all perfect and beautiful *because of it*.

The courage to just be ourselves. Like my Uncle Bill, Father Bill, who had the courage to be quirky (One evening, my priest-uncle introduced me to the wonder of the classic rock band Jethro Tull!)

If I, if we, think about it enough, we might conclude that much of life feels like that night time of Nicodemus: not feeling that we have enough information to make a major life decision; facing so many uncertainties in the future from inflation, to health, to job security. Nicodemus – or “Nicky” as Alison, Jacqueline and James revised the story – as confused as they were, we know that Nicky appeared at the end of John's Gospel, helping Joseph of Arimathea tend to Jesus' body after his death.

Did he figure out for himself what being “born anew” or “born from above” meant? I can't say for sure. But there he was, in the darkest days. No mountaintop wonder comes close to the significance of moments of grief, of care, of being there for each other, you and I, in those Lenten wilderness days, awaiting the Easter Joy. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> See Psalm 139, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+139&version=NRSVUE>