

## **WERE YOU THERE !?**

**February 17, 2008**

**Deacon Colleen Spaeth**

Sing - **Were you there ? ...**

And if you weren't there, where were you? We are at the second Sunday of Lent, a time of reconciliation to our faith. Not only a time of reconciliation, but a time of renewal as well, a time to refresh our faith. It is not even a time of putting on new clothes, but a time of becoming new people. And how do we go about it? Well, first of all, it might require that we **STOP** and close our eyes.

When I read the story of Abram today, I mean I am sure my reactions may not be so faith-full. I mean, come on already, poor Abram, soon to be Abraham has probably paid his dues. He's 75, for goodness sake, and his wife is barren, shouldn't he be able to use his senior citizen status to check out of active status, go into retirement mode and glide into the golden years plus and on into eternity?

But no, God comes and says to Abram, hey Abram, how about leaving your land that you know, everything you know, and go to a new place? And we learn that Abram answers yes, in faith, not knowing where God's taking him, but trusting in God's word, God's promises.

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We're not given a hint as to why Abram was chosen. Why didn't God pick a younger guy, a yuppie maybe and his young wife? No, God's promises for a new life, a transformed world, depend upon an old man and his barren partner.

You never know who God is going to use. Our God is way too big for our box to try to figure him out, isn't he? Who's next?

Well, then there's Nicodemus, the leader, the Pharisee, the representative of Jewish orthodoxy at its best. Nicodemus, the careful man, aware of the position he holds, doesn't want to jeopardize that. He sneaks to see Jesus at night, something no one else in the gospel narratives ever does. He senses in Jesus a spiritual dimension he has never seen before, but the crowd that Nicodemus hangs around with think that Jesus is not worthy of respect.

"Rabbi, I know that you are a teacher from God, how else could you do what we have seen you do? I know you are special. Tell me, Jesus, tell me. What's that, born again, born from above? What is that? How can that be? How can I get back into the womb and be born again?"

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Why the heck did Nicodemus take a risk and come in the dark to have a conversation with Jesus? Could it be that he knew that Jesus had the answers? But could it be that maybe Nicodemus didn't have the right questions? Nicodemus wanted to know how-to, how to win the prize...

But Jesus is sooo good. Jesus saw past the questions, and sensed the real questions behind the questions. What brought this curious leader out in the dark really? Could the questions really be, WHO AM I, Where do I belong? How can I be at peace with who I am? What would you have me do, my Lord?

These are the kind of questions that keep us awake at night, aren't they? And the story Jesus tells is one of spirit, being born of the spirit, the ruach.

Jesus doesn't condemn Nicodemus, he doesn't judge him. Instead he invites him into the pool, "Come on in, the water's fine! There's more to life than what meets the eye. If you want to see the kingdom of God, jump in the pool." Nicodemus is invited to go deeper on his faith journey, but poor Nicodemus wants to know how deep it is before he jumps in. He wants proof. He still

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doesn't get it, not yet, that it's all a matter of trust. He cannot hear with the ears of faith. At least not yet.

What would it look like in our lives if we were to understand this notion of being born of the spirit? Most of us think we know who God is, what God is calling us to be, what God wants us to do. What if we stopped talking? What if we stopped being certain we know the answers to it all, what if we were to stop telling God what we know, what if we just stopped and waited, and expected the spirit of God? Would we be a better people, better parents, better Christians?

This whole notion of struggling to be a spiritual person. Who are we anyway, spiritual or not? Do we compartmentalize our life so that we have the spiritual here, the job here, the family here, the church here, our relationships here? You might say that are you not a spiritual person.

What if we were all just a spiritual people struggling to be human? What would it look like?

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Yet another campus shooting this week. It was curious as I watched the news, a half a dozen people dead. The kids were standing outside and what were they doing? They were praying. They were holding a prayer vigil. How could that happen unless they were a spiritual people struggling with what it is to be human? They were holding on to each other, and reaching for the spirit, the presence of God,

Until we make a leap of faith, the joy of the Lord may remain beyond our reach. Until we surrender to God's intention for our lives, and move into a greater love affair with our Creator the joy of the Lord remains beyond our reach. Without faith we only see the surface of the pool. We miss the depth, we miss the real joy. Faith in God gives us the eyes to see and the ears to hear the spirit of God, the ruach.

So have we shown up for Lent yet? It's still not too late. Maybe tonight, like Nicodemus, we could sneak into the darkness, into a conversation with Jesus. But we should hurry it up, Good Friday is fast approaching.

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... woah woah – sometimes it causes me to tremble,  
tremble, tremble – were you there when they crucified my Lord.