

“Reorienting”

John 3:1-17, Revelation 3:20, Romans 8:12-17a, Isaiah 6:1-8

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Barbara Brown Taylor writes; “Once upon a time, there was a woman who set out to discover the meaning of life. First she read everything she could get her hands on--history, philosophy, psychology, religion. While she became a very smart person, nothing she read gave her the answer she was looking for. She found other smart people and asked them about the meaning of life, but while their discussions were long and lively, no two of them agreed on the same thing and still she had no answer. Finally she put all her belongings in storage and set off in search of the meaning of life. Everywhere she went, people told her they did not know the meaning of life, but they had heard of a man who did, who lived deep in the Himalayas, a tiny little hut perched on the side of a mountain just below the tree line. She climbed and climbed to reach his front door. When she finally got there, with knuckles so cold they hardly worked, she knocked. "Yes?" said the kind-looking man who opened it. Ecstatic she blurted. "I have come halfway around the world to ask you one question," she said, gasping for breath. "What is the meaning of life?" "Please come in and have some tea," the man said. "No thank you," she said. "I didn't come all this way for tea. I came for an answer. Won't you tell me, please, what is the meaning of life?" "We shall have tea," the man said, so she gave up and came inside. While he was brewing the tea she caught her breath and began telling him about all the books she had read, all the people she had met, all the places she had been. The man listened and as she talked he placed a fragile tea cup in her hand. Then he began to pour the tea. She was so busy talking that she did not notice when the tea cup was full, so the man just kept pouring until the tea ran over the sides of the cup and spilled to the floor in a steaming waterfall. "What are you doing?" she yelled when the tea burned her hand. "It's full, can't you see that? Stop! There's no more room!" "Just so," the man said to her. "You come here wanting something from me, but what am I to do? There is no more room in your cup. Come back when it is empty and then we will talk."

Meanwhile, several thousand miles to the west, a ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. They also dispensed with a tea ritual, but the outcome was the same. Nicodemus came looking for answers. Jesus poured tea all over his visitor's hand and said, in effect, that Nicodemus already had gallons of answers available to him. What he needed was one drop of experience--one moment of new birth--and he could leave all his answers lying in puddles on the floor.

Part of the problem, I think, was the difference between what Jesus meant when he said "believe" and what Nicodemus thought it meant. On one level, to believe, someone means simply to accept what that person says as true, usually on the basis of some evidence. Someone shows you a picture of herself climbing the rock face of a mountain, tells you it can be done, and you say, "I believe you." You accept the proposition. You give your intellectual assent, but it does not interfere with the way you live your life, because it is all in your head. There is another level of belief that is much more visceral. Instead of showing you the pictures, someone invites you to go rock climbing with her. As she checks the knots on your harness and runs your safety line through the carabineer around her own waist, she assures you that everything will be all right. The proper response at that point is not "I believe you" but "I believe in you," because you are way past anything like intellectual assent. You have set yourself in relationship with this person, and you are trusting her with your life.

Nicodemus was halfway there. He came by night to interview the new teacher in town. He knew he was good because he had checked his references, but he wanted more information. Nicodemus wanted Jesus to say something that would take away his doubts and make it easy for him to say yes, but the teacher would not cooperate. Believe in me. That was Jesus' dare to Nicodemus. Turn your cup upside down. Turn your mind inside out. Step into the air. Ride the wind. Be born anew, and live. "How can this be?" Those are Nicodemus's last words in this passage, which makes him a sort of patron saint for all of us who get stuck at the foot of the mountain, looking up, without the faintest idea of how to begin. Here is how, Jesus says. Watch me. Put your hand here. Now bring up your foot. Don't think about it too hard. Just do as I do. Believe me. Believe in me, and when we get to the top, we will have some tea."

The gospel of John proclaims. **John 3:1-17, "There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." "What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit." "How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked. Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life. "For God loved the world so much that God gave God's one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. God sent Jesus into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Jesus.**

Nicodemus wanted facts; he wanted to be able to get a good handle on life and to understand it completely. Albert Einstein said, "The most beautiful thing a person can experience is the mysterious. A person who can no longer stop to wonder, to stand in awe of the mystery of life, is as good as dead."

Jesus filled Nicodemus' emptiness. Reorienting is defined as getting bearings, to find out where you are or where you are going after being lost. Reorienting is adapting to a new situation, to change the direction of your behavior. Nicodemus thought he was full until he saw the miracles of Jesus, the healings, the grace, the joy, the love. Nicodemus wanted that same exuberant abundant life he saw in the people who spent time with Jesus. Jesus knew exactly what Nicodemus was looking for. Jesus needed to stretch his mind, expand his heart, and open him to the Holy Spirit to reorient his life. Jesus said we need to be born again, to see the Kingdom of God, to be born of water and Spirit. Just then a gust of wind made the dying embers of the campfire burst into flame. Jesus explains that's the type of transformation I am talking about. The Holy Spirit will set your heart afire, illumine your thoughts, set aflame your passion. This transformation is from the inside out, a reorientation of the self, not toward the world, but directly toward God. The Holy Spirit continually gives us a fresh start, new life and fills us with God's steadfast, eternal, saving love. The Holy Spirit inspires our faith and bolsters our trust in God who is inviting, loving, attracting and charming us.

Today is Trinity Sunday. In the story of Nicodemus, we experience God as Creator who offers us boundless love, God the Redeemer, Jesus, who came down from heaven to reveal love, and God the Holy Spirit who infuses our lives with glorious blessings and a bountiful life. The Trinity is action, your rejuvenated life today and your eternal resurrection life in the future. The Trinity is a force where all three persons of God are working together creating and sustaining a synergy. This relationship of love is the foundation, the bedrock of the universe; it is the heartbeat of all creation. Everything that begins in the Trinity, it has its purpose and its meaning in the Trinity and will find its fulfillment in the Trinity.

Gerald May says, "God is closer to us than our breath. Closer than we are to ourselves. We are in God, like a stone is in the earth, already in the Center. There is no way to get any closer to God than we already are. The spiritual life, then, is not about coming closer to God but rather the realization of the communion and union that already exists and always has and always will, forever." Heaven begins when we recognize God's love, receive God's love, and love becoming fully alive.

Our Call to Worship celebrated the Creator speaking to us. The story of Nicodemus celebrates the Holy Spirit reorienting and setting us ablaze with life. Jesus said, **Revelation 3:20** "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you and you with me." In Jesus we celebrate our intimate God who enjoys talking and listening to us, being with us, enjoying a simple meal with us.

The Holy Spirit reorients us to receive love and love like a plant arching itself toward the light in order to live, grow and thrive. We continually need the nourishment of God, otherwise we become weak, exhausted, and die. The Holy Spirit is constantly working in us to reveal new facets of God.

The Apostle Paul urges us to reorient away from our selfish, sinful, unloving desires to a life in the Spirit which is abundant with blessings. **Romans 8:12-17a** **Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are God's children, we are God's heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory.**

Isaiah was sad, overwhelmed by his mistakes and discouraged by what was happening in the world until the Holy Spirit helped him find his voice. **Isaiah 6:1-8** **It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. God was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of God's robe filled the Temple. Attending God were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!" Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD of Heaven's Armies." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven." Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."**

A poor group of kids found joy in listening to baseball games on the radio. Inspired, they formed a baseball team, cleared a lot filled with garbage and began playing in the dirt. They dreamed of playing on a real baseball field, like the ones described on the radio, with cut grass something they never saw in their poor community. They were invited to play in the United States and the first thing they did when

they got to the field was to smell, feel and roll in the grass. They were filled with awe, wonder and pure joy which gave them hope, reorienting them into a more wonderful life.

The Holy Spirit is wind, water, breath, new life, grace, joy, peace and love. The Holy Spirit enables you to empty yourself and receive all you truly need and much more. The Holy Spirit is like an experience that reorients your life, like belief flowing from a God sighting, like a wind that fuels a dying ember into a robust fire, like thunder booming with God's majestic voice, like the wonder that comes from enjoying fresh cut grass, like a comforting cup of tea with a good friend, like the trust a rock climber has in their belayer, like a purifying hot coal, like a motivating dream that gives you your voice, like the nourishment the sun provides a plant, like the love that draws a family together, like holy mysterious communion around the Lord's table. Amen