

A Slow Growth Product ~ March 20, 2011
Exodus 12:1-4a; John 3:1-17; Psalm 121 3-20-2011

When I was growing up I was blessed to be shepherded along my spiritual path by a very good pastor who showed me and the rest of his large congregation, the value of thinking about our faith, examining it and always being free to ask any questions we might have. These questions ranged from wondering why there were two Creation stories in the Bible, to why the last book in the Bible is the Book of Revelation, not “Revelations,” to what it meant to be “born again.”

I grew up as a Congregationalist and have always relished the freedom we have to take scripture, ponder it and discover where the meat and bones are in it for us. Those who know me best, know that I have a rather eclectic faith system with Christianity as its enduring base. Pieces of it come from here and there and blend together to make a whole that makes a lot of sense to me as I move along adjusting it with every step.

Many of us seem to stub our toes on the story of Nicodemus and the topic of being “born again.” It is a difficult topic to consider and can cause deep divisions among the followers of Jesus. Sometimes we have been put off by our brothers and sisters in Christ who insist that, if we don’t know the exact time and place we have been born into a fuller knowledge of Christ and the way he taught us to live, we are not on the right track and we do not have the value they possess in the eyes of God. They tell us that there is only one way to be a true Christian and if we do not fit in the same restrictive mold we are not worthy of the name

I do not believe this is true. For me, growing into the best Christian, through becoming the best human I can become, is a slow growth product. There has been no lightning bolt in my life. Instead, it has been a lifelong process of reviewing the teachings of Christ over and over again and trying to discover where my rough edges exist and then trying to smooth them out a bit. This requires that I spend some time reflecting on where I am in life and just who I am from time to time and then making adjustments. There is always an adaptation, or two or three, that needs to be made in the way I handle life and its situations.

Making adjustments is never quite enough, I then need to practice the new pathway I have found that leads me into a better understanding of who it is I should become. This is true for any of us who want to continue growing as we travel on our spiritual journeys. Each of us journeys in a different way, each seeking to find what it is that leads us to a closer relationship with God. We all become born again in our own time and our own way. We need to discover what it is in life that deserves our attention and then keep our focus on all that is good and true and fair. We need to learn to set aside all the trivial matters that stir us up and scatter us and find what is worth pursuing.

Henri Nouwen wrote a beautiful little prayer some years back that reminds us of what it is in life that is most important. This prayer encourages us to put the events in life into proper perspective and move forward as we seek to become all that we can be, as we seek to open ourselves to discover the spirit of God that dwells within us. I read this prayer often when I feel as if the world is being pulled apart by causes that seem to seek to divide us as a community, as a country and as a world. Issues, that seem to be engaging and all-absorbing at the present

moment, change in time and we are enabled to begin to see how unimportant such struggles are in the vast scheme of things. The words of that little prayer are:

O Lord, life passes by swiftly. Events that a few years ago kept me totally preoccupied have now become vague memories; conflicts that a few months ago seemed so crucial in my life now seem futile and hardly worth the energy; inner turmoil that robbed me of my sleep only a few weeks ago has now become a strange emotion of the past; books that filled me with amazement a few days ago now do not seem as important; thoughts which kept my mind captive only a few hours ago, have now lost their power and have been replaced by others.

Why is it so hard to learn from this insight? Why am I continuously trapped by a sense of urgency and emergency? Why do I not see that you are eternal, that your kingdom lasts forever and that for you a thousand years are like one day? O Lord, let me enter into your presence and there taste the eternal, timeless, everlasting love with which you invite me to let go of my time-bound anxieties, fears, preoccupations, and worries. "Seek first the kingdom and all these other things will be given you as well." All that is time-bound will show its real meaning when I can look at it from the place that you want me to be, the place of undying love.

Lord, teach me your ways and give me the courage to follow them. -- Amen

When we discover that place of undying love, which we all possess, we will know what it is to be "born again" into a life that is full of the ability to accept others where they are in life and to offer them love, forgiveness, joy and hope. That is what our faith is all about.

-- Amen