

CEC 2 Lent, Year A: 20 March 2011

Does anybody else here love those cartoony adventure movies,
Like the Brendan Fraser mummy series or Indiana Jones?
I particularly love the last one of these
where Sean Connery and Harrison Ford play father and son.
This is the film in which they search for the Holy Grail, the cup of Christ.
Part of the reason I like this film so much is due to Sean Connery's character.
He has spent his whole life trying to find the Holy Grail.
The cup has been his life's quest.
With that in mind, in the film he delivers two lines that are wonderful.

The first line occurs when he is talking to Harrison Ford
about three traps developed to protect the Grail.
He tells his son these traps are present and they are lethal.
Ford asks how to defeat them.
With a huge smile on his face, Connery replies,
"I don't know. We'll find out when we get there."
The second line occurs at the end of the film.
The cup has been lost forever.
For Indiana the search has ended badly.
He looks at his father and apologizes for losing the Grail.
Then he asks him what he got out of the search.
Dr. Jones replies with one word: "Enlightenment."

Connery's character in this film could easily be patterned after Nicodemus.
Both of them are searching for something.
Both of them know some of the answers.
But both of them are still somewhat in the dark.

In Connery's role he is a very learned man.
He is highly educated.
He is on a quest for truth.
He doesn't know or understand all of the answers.
He searches around for the answers and the clues like a man stumbling in the dark.

Nicodemus is also a very learned man.
He is a member of the inner council of the Temple.
He is well versed in The Law of Moses.
He too, is on a search, a search for truth.
He is stumbling in the dark looking for answers.
He comes to Jesus looking for the truth.
He comes to Jesus because he feels that Jesus knows the truth.

Nicodemus is a little scared though.
He comes to Jesus at night.
He doesn't want others to see him.

*This sermon was written by The Rev. Theo Park and delivered at Christ Episcopal Church, Red Wing.
Fr. Theo thanks all those whose material he has borrowed and apologizes to those he has overlooked.*

In the Gospel of John, darkness always carries symbolic meaning.
Darkness represents separation from the presence of God.
Nicodemus is searching for the presence of God.
He is blind; he doesn't realize the presence of God is sitting right in front of him.
Nicodemus is searching for enlightenment.

As Nicodemus and Jesus begin their conversation,
Nicodemus recognizes Jesus as a teacher and prophet of God.
His actions of teaching and healing are what has drawn Nicodemus to Jesus.
Nicodemus has seen these acts and has been drawn to Jesus like a moth to a flame.
Nicodemus knows Jesus has the answers to his questions.

But Nicodemus is stumbling around in the dark.
He is unable to comprehend the spiritual dimension of his conversation with Jesus.
He comes to Jesus and wants answers.
Jesus' first reply holds the key to his quest,
but Nicodemus doesn't understand the response.
Most of the time, most of us don't understand the response either.
We don't understand because of the subtlety of the Greek language
as it is translated into English.
Jesus tells Nicodemus, "Very truly, I tell you,
no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."
The two words "from above" come from the Greek word with three possible meanings:
not only "from above", but also "again" and "anew".
What we tend to do is take one of the meanings and make it fit.
Nicodemus does the same thing.
In the conversation with Jesus he interprets the word to mean again.
He interprets it literally as a physical rebirth.
We might interpret it the same way.
How can we be physically born a second time?
How can we say or do anything differently to change our birth status?

The author of John is not talking about a physical rebirth, of course.
He is talking about a spiritual birth.
This birth comes through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit of God,
which comes to us and brings us out of darkness into the light.
The Spirit of God moves us from the ways of the world into the ways of God.
We are moved from darkness to light, from absence to presence, from death to life.
Through the power of the Spirit we begin to understand
that the ways of God are better than the ways of the world.

The ways of the world are selfishly oriented.
I'll give you yours as long as I can get mine first is the bottom line of the world.
Many of our corporate systems are set up this way.
That is why we call it climbing the corporate ladder.
In a ladder system there is always somebody below you.
Unless you are at the very top, there is always someone above you.

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Many of our school systems are being set up this way across our country.
Political lines are being drawn following this pattern.
Name the system, large or small, and somewhere in it this pattern can be found.
It may be corporately or it may be within individuals who want to come out on top.

But the way of God is different.
The way of God puts love of God and others first.
This way doesn't mean that we don't love ourselves.
This way shifts the priority.
This way moves the priority away from self to the other.
We give to other the same love God has already given to us.
This action is accomplished through the power of the Spirit.
When we begin to act in this manner we are truly born again and born from above.
For we cannot accomplish this task by ourselves.
To truly love as God loves us requires the presence of God in our lives.
To be willing to love the other to the extent
that we would deny ourselves creature comforts,
the added extras, and possibly even our own lives
requires God's presence within us.
Because to follow this way means we have turned away from the ways of the world.

Connery as Dr. Jones says he found enlightenment when he found the Holy Grail.
He knew the presence of God was real at that point.
Nicodemus also found enlightenment in his conversation with Jesus.
He would later stand and support Jesus in front of the Sanhedrin
on the night Jesus was arrested.
He may not have realized the answer at this point in our reading,
but he did at some time.
He could not have stood before that body and defended Jesus
if he had not received the Spirit of God.

We, too, can be born again, anew, from above.
Having received the Holy Spirit at our baptism,
we can take that same power into the world within us.
We can then move and live our lives in the way of God,
conforming ourselves to the mind of Christ.
And as Paul writes to the Corinthians, if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation.
May we too find and accept enlightenment in Jesus;
may we move and live our lives with love. AMEN.

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