

# *“Where the Wind Blows”*

*Lent 2*

*John 3:1-17*

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From the Pulpit

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Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>7</sup> Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You<sup>[d]</sup> must be born from above.’<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>8</sup> *The wind<sup>[f]</sup> blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.*” <sup>9</sup> Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you<sup>[g]</sup> do not receive our testimony. <sup>12</sup> If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell

*you about heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. <sup>[b]</sup> <sup>14</sup> And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, <sup>15</sup> that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. <sup>[i]</sup> <sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. –  
*John 3:-1-17**

## **Where the Wind Blows**

One of the more simple, yet fascinating things to see at work are fallen leaves being brought to life during the Autumn season. Every year, in every cycle of life, leaves, in all its various colors – brown, and yellow, red and purple - fall from their vines. Often times, leaves fall and are forgotten, deemed lifeless. These leaves fall in parks, in streets, and in our yards. Some have even come onto our doorsteps. Vibrant, sun-kissed leaves fall all around us, and many are swept or blown out of our way. Many of us may not know what comes of them. In

the minds of some, they're nothing more than a thing of the past.

What's fascinating, though, is what you and I can witness while colorful leaves cover the earth: the wind that blows and brings them back to life. While walking down the avenue, in the state park, or finishing up a late evening jog, we see what may appear to be lifeless rise up and move about. In the leaves' movement and rising, the wind can be heard. My favorite is when the wind blows and leaves are brought to life, being lifted upward in a cyclical manner. Have you seen wind at work in this way before? Close your eyes and imagine. Connect with the wind as it blows. Colorful leaves are becoming awakened – fragile and vulnerable in stature - working together in harmony, being lifted higher and higher for us to see.

In these moments, it's as if the wind is working the leaves back towards the branches and vines, the trees and bushes that once held them high. Can you imagine it? Can you hear the wind's voice as it works? We can see the leaves move, but it's not the leaves per se that astound us. They aren't choosing on

their own accord when or where they will go. The leaves are purely moving where the wind blows. Ever-present, the wind blows and mobilizes leaves upward, left and right, over and around different obstructions attempting to entrap them. Sometimes soft and gentle, other times strong and heard abroad. There's a grace about its nature, majestic even. It seems the wind knows what it's doing, and can be trusted, for leaves at least!

Seeing and believing the role wind has with leaves is a long, widely accepted idea and truth. The movement of leaves, however, is but one sign, one demonstration that wind is at the root of liveliness and movement. Most all of us are comfortable with wind as it concerns leaves. Fixing our eyes to see and believe the coming realm of God in our own lives, now that's another story. Here in today's Gospel lesson, Nicodemus and Jesus meet to discuss how to see and understand life's movement in the present and coming world.

Now as a backdrop to this significant meeting, just before John 3, the gospel tells of Jesus' first signs and demonstrations.

First, there's the wedding that takes place in Cana. This story begins past the point of the covenant ceremony between the unnamed bride and bridegroom, at the wedding feast. In those times, wedding feasts have a life of their own, but things turn stale this time as the wine - meant to last and serve everyone - becomes scarce. It's on the third day of the feast that Jesus transforms water into wine, and brings life back to the feast. The arrival of this new wine is no ordinary occurrence. Still, most folks continue onward in the festivities, not putting much care or thought into what the arrival of new wine might mean.

Then, there's the sign and demonstration Jesus performs at the Temple in Jerusalem. Money changers are there, corrupting the Temple by making gains for themselves. After flipping their tables upside down, Jesus drives the money changers away from the Temple and takes their gains back. When asked for a sign to demonstrate under whose authority Jesus is doing these things, Jesus says "Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up." To this sign, most misunderstand since the Temple took decades to build. Only a

few consider Jesus may be signaling to something other than the Temple they built.

Signs and demonstrations are a potent and persistent theme in John. They are, in most cases, hard to see and understand. Jesus performs signs and demonstrations that are new and fresh, in many cases contentious, and most often misleading. To better see and understand them takes some curiosity, bravery, a little bit of imagination...perhaps faith to see signs and demonstrations differently, and I believe that's exactly what leads Nicodemus to Jesus that night. Nicodemus is a man representing ancient tradition. He is a Pharisee, and member of the Sanhedrin. He, like so many others, is dealing with a world amid great change and movement. Like seeing leaves moving about, Nicodemus is aware of Jesus but can't fully see or understand what's at work beneath his words and actions.

In faithful curiosity and bravery, Nicodemus comes to meet Jesus and praises him for his signs. And, as soon as he can get those words from his mouth, the dialogue is abruptly

blown elsewhere. Jesus tells Nicodemus that, in order to see and understand what God is doing, we must be born again. We all must be born anew. This is where the point of contention stems from, to which Jesus says not to astonished by his words, *“the wind blows where it chooses, and [all of us] hear the sound of it, but [we] do not know where it comes from or where it goes.”*

To all Jesus says, Nicodemus poses a final question. One that, today, may resonate with many of us: “How can these things be?” What is it that Nicodemus and the lot of us are missing? What is there, in Jesus’ signs and demonstrations, that we are to look for? Maybe as we become curious, brave, and imaginative, we will begin to see and hear the Spirit differently. Our faithful curiosity and our imagination will lead us where Jesus is always pointing us in his signs and demonstrations. It was “on the third day” that Jesus turned water to wine in Cana. It was in Jerusalem that Jesus told everyone listening that, if and when his life is taken, “in three days, it will be lifted up.” The Spirit, ever-present, is at work in all of Jesus’ signs and demonstrations, and seem to blowing us all toward his

crucifixion, which leads to glorification through resurrection. Isn't that's the point of it all? *For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*"

Signs and demonstrations continue to be potent and persistent in our time and age. Human Rights and Equality, Women's Rights, Race Relations, Healthcare, Education, Environment and Ecology, Foreign Affairs, Immigration, you name it. The teaching I believe Jesus shares with Nicodemus and us today is very significant, and isn't based solely on our most beloved biblical verse, but the entire Good News story. Every day, in every cycle of life, lives are being enlivened. Movements are evident among us everywhere, maybe now more than ever. As we live in this season of signs and demonstrations, can we be sure the Spirit of God is present, enlivening us with its' movement? How will we live in light of such a movement happening before our very eyes? Will we live

where our comforts afford us, or will we follow in curiosity, bravery, imagination, and faith where the wind blows?

Jesus implores us all to reframe our lenses, and to refine our sensory. Connect with where the wind blows. See that lives - fragile and vulnerable in stature - are being awakened today, working together in faithful and spiritual harmony, being lifted higher and higher for more and more of us to see. The spirit is at work behind Christ-like signs and demonstrations. It's as if the Spirit is working to bring lives back towards the branches and vines, the trees and bushes that once held them in an unimaginably high regard. Can you see the Spirit? Can you hear its voice? Imagine and be faithful. Go and be lead where the wind blows. Amen.

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