

Homily, March 1, 2026
The Second Sunday of Lent
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Emmanuel and St. Anne's Episcopal Churches

“Living in the Edge of Becoming”

Sue Monk Kidd, in her biographical narrative, says
"I've given birth to two children, but bringing them into the world was a breeze compared to birthing myself as a woman. . . . Yet there is no place so awake and alive as the edge of becoming." @

“No place so awake and alive as the edge of becoming.” Also, no place quite so threatening and agonizing.

Last Sunday's readings focused on our vulnerability to evil and our failure and complicity with evil. But, today's Gospel raises all those issues of becoming. We live on the raw edge of infinite possibility. We can experience new birth, a total new beginning. OT reading – Abraham the father of a nation in his old age. Infinite possibilities. Romans reading—God brings life out of and calls into existence what does not exist. Apply that to your life—God bringing into existence in your life what does not now exist. Infinite possibilities.

Jesus spoke adverbially to Nicodemus—born from above. So, I want to use adverbial language today to get at this mystery. This could be translated “born again,” because the underlying language allows both, but let's work with “born from above.” Nicodemus heard Jesus saying “again,” but the language of descent in the context calls for us to hear “from above.”

We Live The New Life in Christ From Top to Bottom

Jesus says, “No one ascended.” Hence, we are “begotten from above” Jesus descended because we simply cannot ascend. “Water and spirit” “Flesh produces flesh.” At the human level we can only produce more of our human experience. We cannot lift ourselves into the realm of Spirit. We must be lifted.

Ruth, a church member in New Orleans, said to me that she believed if she payed her debts and kept the Ten commandments and loved her neighbor, she would go to heaven when I die. I pointed out to her that it sounded a bit like trying to swim to Hawaii from California, like starting from the bottom and working her way up.

We do not talk as Ruth did about human relationships. If we fail another human being, we can only make amends by not repeating the behavior and ask for their forgiveness. Only they can set us right by forgiving us. We cannot manipulate that, no matter how hard we may try. Why would we attempt to manipulate God?

Our tradition affirms the need for conversion, the need to be changed by God. It has a beginning somewhere, yes. The questions asked the candidate for baptism offer us a vivid description of conversion. (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 302)

William James delivered lectures 115 years ago that still are in print, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. He talks about two kinds of conversions—once borns and twice borns— dramatic adult experience or conversion through nurture.

My experience as a once-born—ongoing awakening/conversion moments. I could not tell you when Jesus first became real to me, though it was some time before I was baptized at age 9.

Compare my friend Lonnie's twice born experience. He was a professional golfer with a rather tattered history. He read a Gideon Bible in his hotel room and watched Billy Graham on TV. He got on his knees and gave his life to God. He could tell you the day and the hour of his transformation.

You might encounter a twice born person who has no other model for conversion and be intimidated by their "have you been born again?" Their language might not be precise (other ways of talking about being found by God --Seed sprouting, lost sheep found, treasure found, being gathered in a net like fish). But, what they are asking really has to do with whether Jesus is real to you, whether Jesus is more than a word.

British Anglican Bryan Green illustrates it this way.

"I go to bed at midnight. My blind is up. the room is in pitch darkness. Outside here is not even a glimmer of light from a star shining in the sky. At eight o'clock the next morning I awake. The room is full of light. I do not know when darkness left and light came. Even if I had been awake I would not have known in any dramatic way the passing of darkness into light, though I would have noticed the gradual change. I can say, however, 'I went to bed in the dark; I got up in the daylight.' Or I can go to bed with my blind down, tightly drawn. The room is dark. I wake up. I spring out of bed and pull up the blind. The summer sunshine blazes in. 'It is past eight

o'clock,' I exclaim. At a moment of time, by a conscious act, darkness goes and light comes into my room.' &

And, no two people have that experience in exactly the same way. One person told of sitting in church feeling like she didn't belong because she did not believe everything in the Nicene Creed. A voice within said, "I love you. You are my daughter. You belong here." And, she felt God's love. Another, had no experience of God's love until she was loved in a romantic relationship. In that experience she experienced God's love coming in on the heels of romantic love.

How might we imagine God feeling about us? Consider this image. We all love a newborn b/c of their raw possibility and their infinite worth. Imagine yourself right now in the arms of God, a newborn, loved by God for your raw possibility and your infinite worth.

"No place so awake and alive as the edge of becoming."

**We Live the New Life in Christ from Inside Out "wind"
(The wind blows where it will – mystery of not knowing or understanding that.)**

Our new life arises from within - from God's Spirit. We are not controlled by external constraints. "Wind blows where it will" Nicodemus' life was referenced to the institutes and laws of Judaism. Jesus was saying he must experience a basic inner change and begin listening to the inner voice of God. Jesus lived from within—guided by the Spirit.

We all have external reference points and constraints—family/church/expectations of others /school/job possessions. The discipline comes in listening less to those and more to the inner voice of God. When conflict with an external constraint comes, we choose the inner voice—live from within, even if it costs us a relationship, a job, a dream. We listen for the inner whisper of Jesus' voice and go wherever that voice leads. Life lived from the inside out.

We experience that inner life in different ways (Note the handout on four spiritualities from Holy Conversations). Some find God more in the teachings and worship of the church. Some experience God more in acts of service in the world and in advocating for the marginalized and underprivileged. Some find oneness with God more in quiet silence and contemplation. Some experience God more as an emotional response—Jesus as companion—and find joy in witness. We are not to be intimidated by someone's experience different from our own.

We are called to have Jesus living within and live from within first. Do the crazy, irrational, unpopular thing if in our hearts we know it is God's call and it is right. "All desires known." What are the holiest recurring desires? Go there.

"No place so awake and alive as the edge of becoming."

My Invitation to You

Today, you can begin this journey of transformation or renew it after a lapse. Faith in Jesus Christ or renewed commitment to him. Receive Christ in bread and wine and pray that his love will leap up within you like a spring,

How to make this concrete? As you might predict for me, a poem.

**Last night, as I was sleeping,
I dreamt--marvelous error!-- (or grand illusion)
that a spring was breaking
out in my heart.
I said: Along which secret aqueduct,
Oh water, are you coming to me,
water of a new life
that I have never drunk?**

**Last night as I was sleeping
I dreamt--marvelous error!--
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.**

**Last night, as I was sleeping,
I dreamt--marvelous error!--
that a fiery sun was giving
light inside my heart.
it was fiery because I felt
warmth as from a hearth,
and sun because it gave light**

and brought tears to my eyes.

**Last night, as I slept,
I dreamt--marvelous error!--
that it was God I had
here inside my heart. #**

So, there you have it. Our challenges—live from the top down. Invite Christ to awaken within us. And, from the inside out—listen for Jesus’ voice and go wherever Jesus leads.

“No place so awake and alive as the edge of becoming.”

I invite you into Dag Hammarskjöld’s prayer of commitment.
"--Night is drawing nigh--"
For all that has been--Thanks!
To all that shall be--Yes! \$

Notes

@ Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 10.

& Bryan Green, *The Practice of Evangelism*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), pp. 36-37.

Times Alone: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado, trans. Robert Bly (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan UP, 1983), pp. 43-45.

\$ Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*, trans. Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 89.