

1. Long time ago, a missionary who was driving through a rural area in South Korea saw an elderly lady walking with heavy luggage on her head. The missionary offered her a ride. The lady got in the car, but wouldn't put the luggage down. When he asked why she wouldn't put it down, she said, "I already feel bad bothering you for a ride – I'd feel terrible if I put this luggage down, too."

Well... It's up to her but once she's in the car, the total weight given to the car is the same whether she's carrying the luggage on her head or putting it down. In a sense, when you live believing in Jesus as the Lord, it means that you are no longer responsible for your life alone, but that Jesus helps and takes responsibility for your life. John 1:12 says, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." You are not orphans because God is your Heavenly Father throughout your life. But don't you sometimes feel like taking charge of your life on your own? Aren't you trying to carry the heavy burden of life alone? Jesus said. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28).

Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent. In the Lectionary given to us today, there is a scene where Jesus is talking to a man named Nicodemus in Chapter 3 of the Gospel of John. Nicodemus was one of those impressed by Jesus' miracles, and a member of the ruling Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the highest decision-making body at the time, consisting of 71 members. He was religious, educated, influential, and earnest enough to come by night. Because the Pharisees had vested interests within Judaism, most of them disliked Jesus for challenging that system. However, Nicodemus came to Jesus and told him two things: first, you are a teacher who came from God, and second, that no one could do the miracles that Jesus was doing unless

God was with him.

Then Jesus answered and said to him in verse 3, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Jesus suddenly spoke to Nicodemus about being born again. Jesus' answer to Nicodemus shattered the Jewish assumption that their racial identity, their ancient birth, guaranteed them a place in God's kingdom. It was taught widely among the Jews at that time that since they descended from Abraham, they were automatically assured of heaven. Jesus made it clear that a person's first birth does not guarantee a kingdom. Only being born again gives this assurance.

2. Jesus says only when you are born again, you can see the Kingdom of God. What does it mean to be born again? What does it mean to be born again? In Greek, the original language of the New Testament, this word is "anōthen." This word has two meanings: first, "From above" second, "Anew". Essentially, this means to have new life. Moral or religious reform isn't enough. One must be born again. Then in verse 4, Nicodemus asks how one can enter the womb and be born again. So, Jesus used another expression to explain, "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit." Earlier, He said "born again," but now he says one must be "born of water and spirit" to enter the Kingdom of God.

John the Baptist, who at the time baptized with water, declared: "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Being baptized by water means to repent, receive the forgiveness of sins, and living a new life by the grace of God. Of course, the kingdom of God here emphasizes God's rule rather than the concept of place. The kingdom of God has a futuristic meaning, but the kingdom of God is already in your life. If the Word of God governs your life, it means that you are already living in the kingdom of God.

Although we get to experience the Kingdom of God and see it, that experience is limited by the weakness of our flesh in this world. But the Kingdom of God doesn't end with such limited experiences. We must enter it eventually. There is a saying, "while we are on this earth, the Kingdom of God dwells in us, and on the day we leave this world, we enter the Kingdom of God."

3. John 3 that we read today is connected to John 2, which records the first miracle of Jesus, turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. It is no accident that Jesus says "Unless one is born again by water and spirit, one cannot enter the Kingdom of God" right after the wedding feast in John 2. What is the point of turning water into wine? It's so that we would believe. But what? It is that Jesus who came to this world for us can transform us! Even us! We use expressions like "born again" without much understanding. That's why the apostle John introduces the wine miracle first.

Being born again by the Spirit is like water turning into wine. Water is water, and wine is wine. I once watched a video about how to marinate meat. Because it was aged over time, the meat tasted really great! Some things improve in quality over time, but water turning into wine is not an upgrade, but a transformation. It is a fundamental change into something completely different. Water cannot be turned into wine even if it tries its best. Similarly, we cannot be born again through our own efforts; only Jesus can transform us. Matthew 3:9 "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." It is an ontological change for those who were alienated from God due to sin to become children of God.

By his first miracle, Jesus showed a "fundamental change" in his disciples. Those who believe in Jesus will change. They must change! Of course, there are areas that change gradually (our faith and character must not remain in

the same place and be sanctified with the grace of God on the way of perfection). But first, there must be a fundamental change. "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" (John 3:16).

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, for John that "eternal life" that Jesus promises is not just life in eternity, it's life right now that is touched by the eternal gifts and grace. I hope and pray that the grace of God will transform not only your life, but the world. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.