TRINITY SUNDAY 27 May 2018 - John 3. 1-17 AScension

Pharisees, the “Separate Ones,” were the strictest sect of Jewry. They believed that Scripture contained an inspired set of rules to govern every single situation, which, if literally and unflinchingly followed, pleased God Almighty. But centuries of added 100s and 1000s of age-old interpretations had made the Law ridiculous.

For example, to tie a knot on the Holy Sabbath was a prohibited work. But, a woman could knot her girdle. Aha! to water a thirsty beast at a well, and still be kosher on the Sabbath, a man could tie a bucket to a woman’s girdle and then to a rope, lower the bucket, and commit no sin.

Naturally, with humour and common sense, rule-breaking Jesus undermined such meaningless fancies.

Nicodemus was a devout and scrupulous, if not uptight keeper of every fiddle-dee-dee legal insignificance, who was thus assured of a place in heaven. But his conscience twinged “There’s something missing.”

From sideline shadows, he had watched Jesus perform signs and wonders and give amazing interpretations of the Law, “It was said of old, but I say…” It seemed to Nic that God was pouring out life through Jesus that seemed to bring new life and love to his hearers, which happiness was unobtainable through staid Judaism.

And, Nic was convinced that this was not by the power of Beelzebub as the Pharisee leaders thought.

To Nic, Jesus seemed to have open -minded, contemporary answers to niggling every-day problems, which he proffered with authority.

Nic may have heard how Jesus had changed through a forty-day sojourn in the wilderness. Out there, he had listened to the restless Spirit wind blow through him, to bear away any thought of following the deadening old ways as a narrowly fundamentalist messenger of God. No! He would choose to be a free-spirited Messiah.

Fearing that his Pharisee peers would think he had gone over to the dark side by seeking advice from a law-breaker, Jesus, Nic had come cautiously to Jesus by cover of night. He did not come to ask what to do to be saved. As a cream-of-the-crop Pharisee, he assumed his place in heaven was assured.

Jesus greeted him warmly. Nic, old son, your loving personality is being crushed by your keeping every crippling, crimping detail of the Jewish Law, all those countless, restrictive clauses.

Jesus continued “Nic, in the wilderness, I experienced a fenceless, Spirit-like wind no-one can control, its origin, its intensity, its destination blows where it pleases, but, its effects are startlingly effective, just like things you cannot glean from musty, desiccated scrolls.”

Jesus went on “The work of God’s Holy Spirt wind blows to give new birth to all under the deathly darkness of the old, cold law.

Nic, let God’s Spirit wind of limitless love blow open your hospitable mind to see everyone as an equal, and so give yourself a chance to become freely, generously alive and happy. This total mind change, this transformation from inside out, can feel like being born anew, it’s like being given a fresh start over and over again.”

Jesus went further, “Nic, previously, just as Creator God breathed life into human clay in the Garden of Eden, and later, as God breathed new life into the Old Testament prophets, do you remember the vision of the Valley of dry bones over which Elijah commanded “Dry Bones! Listen to the words of the Lord. I will put breath into you and make you live again. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender heart of flesh?”

Nic, the religion of God’s Chosen People may have become spiritually dead, without hope of vitality, so I have come to renew and restore religion to new life. Look at me and live!” Is that the life missing in you at all?

On Calvary, when mice-like, the disciples scattered into dark hiding, Nicodemus stood out openly as one of Jesus’ few remaining sympathizers. With the help of a second Jew disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus took down the limp body and laid it tenderly in the arms of the grieving Mother. Jewish teaching was: to touch anyone dead, would incur ritual defilement, just as the Holy Shabbat began.

But, by then, the Spirit of God had blown so powerfully into Nic’s loving self, that he openly carried his Lord to his rest, singing the mournful Jewish Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, as he went.

Nicodemus had stepped through the darkness of doubt to be re-born in the daylight of the new life, bought by Jesus.

For the first time in his life, he had found the peace with its strength that surpasses all joy, as all of us, born again by Baptismal water and the Holy Spirit may also do.

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory.