

Nicodemus comes to speak to Jesus under the cover of night. He is one of the Jewish authorities, but he feels a need to talk with Jesus. He just doesn't want anyone to see him do it. He is intrigued. "Rabbi," he says, "no one can do the things you do unless God is with him."

Jesus answers him, "This is a really important truth: no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus can't get out of his literal way of thinking.

"Can I enter into my mother's womb and be born a second time?"

Jesus answers him, " Listen to this important truth: no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit."

Water and Spirit. We are born of water through our birth- the water of the mother's womb. We are born of Spirit when we become aware of our connection to God. When we are aware that we live within God, we become increasingly aware that the Spirit of God blows where it wills. It makes everything possible. And here's the thing about the Spirit—it's not a tame spirit. That Spirit can take us *anywhere*, which can make us anxious.

But Jesus says we need to access both water: our humanity, and Spirit: our destiny as children of God.

We often think that as "children of God" we should prioritize our schedules, make our rules, define our parameters. We want certainty. It makes us feel less anxious, safer and more in control.

But the Spirit doesn't worry about those things. The Spirit knows we are always safe-- after all, we live in God-- nothing can ever truly harm us. And—just like the Children of God we are—it wouldn't hurt if we were more childlike—open to new experiences and unexpected destinations.

I remember getting in the family car one summer weekend to enjoy one of our favorite games: getting lost. This game involved getting into the car and driving and driving—taking obscure back roads-- until no one knew where we were.

One Sunday we ended up in a wonderful cemetery. It was completely secluded; it had a pond and lots of oak trees. Cemeteries have always been a magnet for the Smith family because they're so peaceful and fun. First, we unloaded our food hamper and blankets and had a picnic. Then we started reading the tombstones.

Some were sad: one said "unknown" and we talked for awhile about all the reasons why that might have been. Then dad found one for a Colonel Mustard. I'm not joking. And his epitaph: "Colonel Mustard did not relish death."

That started us all on a search for the weirdest and funniest tombstones. It was a great day—and I've never forgotten it. And to this day I love exploring cemeteries.

Isn't it funny how it's the unexpected things that happen to us that we remember the best—and how those events become the stories we re-tell and re-tell throughout the years.

And-- let's take it further- the really big things that happen in our lives-- did WE really make them happen? Or was there the indelible mark of that wild Spirit which blows us where it chooses-- not necessarily taking us where we *want* to go, but always taking us where we *need* to go.

So—has the Spirit been blowing new winds of unexpectedness to us and to our mission as the Church as members of St. Thomas’?

To answer that question, let’s read how the *Book of Common Prayer* defines "the mission of the Church." It’s in the catechism at the top of page 855 in the Book of Common Prayer.

Let’s read it together: *"The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."*

And how does it do this?

*"The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love."*

That is our mission.

And our mission is to do that wherever the Spirit leads us. Our mission is to be open in our human experience to the movement of the Spirit. To go to unlikely, unexpected places where the Spirit will lead us. To be born of water *and* Spirit.

Some of us may have specific thoughts about where our mission *should* take us, and that's wonderful-- but we should also be open to the unexpected places, the unexpected missions, the places we really need to go-- through the experiences that the Spirit puts in our path.

Very soon I will be calling a parish meeting to discuss the future of St. Thomas, our buildings, and our community. Now, some of us may already think we know the ways the future needs to unfold, but I'll bet that the Spirit of God has plans for us too, futures we hadn't even dreamed of—places *we* need to go. Places we never envisioned.

Our mission is to follow the Spirit’s lead: to listen not only to our own human discernment, but also to listen for the whispers of the Spirit.

We are helping build the kingdom, as we continue *"praying and worshiping, proclaiming the Gospel, and promoting justice, peace, and love."* And we do that through water and Spirit: because we are both human and living within God.

Sometimes mission isn't what we plan, it's what finds us. And sometimes the unexpected destinations can be the most amazing. Amen.