

7 Ways of Resistance for Lent
Week Two: Reformation
John 3:1-17

Not all the Pharisees were bad, you know. That's a story we've made up as Christians to justify negative views toward the Jewish people. Not all Pharisees were out to get Jesus. Not all Pharisees agreed with Jesus but still didn't want harm to come to him (see Luke 13:31). Some Pharisees were intrigued by Jesus. Nicodemus was one of them.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night—so he wouldn't attract attention. Jesus was an itinerant preacher already causing trouble among local authorities. They lived in the Empire, so you can understand the fear of getting local authorities, even if they were of your own people, involved or suspicious of anything that might signify rebellion.

Nicodemus told him that they (indicating others, not just him) knew he was a teacher sent from God. And Jesus replied with, "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus missed the symbolism here. He's thinking of crawling back into his mother's womb to be born again. It's ridiculous! You're only born once, isn't that enough? Besides, everyone grows up and grows old and dies, that's the way of things.

Jesus says, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit."

Would have helped if you said that the first time. But still—that's kind of a tall order! What does that all mean?

The Spirit is the same spirit that blew down from God over the waters of the deep and brought forth light and life in the very first verses of Scripture. The waters of the deep, and the wind from God that swept over the waters. Get it? You need to go back to the beginning.

What? "How can these things be?" You can't go back to the beginning. We are now. We are in a linear model of thinking and keeping track of time.

"You're a teacher of Israel and you don't understand these things?" Hello, Nicodemus! Look through the Scriptures. God is constantly turning the world upside down and reminding us that God's time, *Kairos* time, is not *Chronos*, chronological time.

I've told you about how God doesn't work the way the world works, but you still don't understand. It's like the people looking down in the wilderness and seeing only the troubles in front of them, biting each other like snakes. It wasn't until they lifted up their eyes that they saw God's way, that they didn't have to quarrel and fight and bite and sting one another. So, too, must the Son of Humanity be lifted up, so we can see above ourselves, above our understanding of the world and time and each other...

So that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. Because when we look down, all we see is what is in front of us. Death. But when we look up, we see what God has in store for us: eternity.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life...." And listen up, don't stop there! Keep going! "Indeed, God did not send

his Son into the world in order to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Jesus wasn't about condemnation but about SAVING. THE. WORLD. Because guess what? We've already condemned ourselves. We're like the people in the wilderness refusing to listen to Moses and getting bit and stung by one another because we can only quarrel and bicker and go to war with one another instead of lifting our vision to see what God wants for us.

We need to reform our thinking. We need to go back to the beginning. Start all over. (Tracy Chapman sings a fabulous song about this).

To start over doesn't mean we go back fifty years to remember how good things used to be. That's what the people did in the wilderness, remember? It's what led to them being bit and stung. It's not about trying to live in the past. Instead, it's about reforming our thinking, going back and seeing things in a new way.

(STAR WARS fans: Maz Kanata does this with Rey, when she wants to get back to Jakku to wait for the ones who left her, and Maz tells her they aren't coming back. The belonging she seeks is not behind her, but ahead of her).

Jesus knew Nicodemus was a good teacher, a smart one. But Nicodemus was still working on linear thinking and that we can't go back. Instead, we must all go back and start over, by being born of water and Spirit, by recognizing that we need to go back and start with God's intention for the world and for us in Genesis 1. It's going back and seeing each other as part of God's creation, that the world was given for us to be good stewards of, that there is enough for all, and that we are all created in the image of God.

Worship Ideas for Reformation

Table décor: mirrors and empty picture frames, symbolic of seeing ourselves and seeing one another through new lens, reframing our thinking. Prisms would also be good, to see one another in the light of God. Basins and pitchers of water—and you could place the mirrors in ways that reflect the light on the water.

Mission Ideas for Reformation

-Learn about the Dakota Access Pipeline and the efforts to stop the construction through the sacred land of the Standing Rock tribe: <http://standwithstandingrock.net/>

-Learn about the Flint Water Crisis and what you can do to help:

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/04/us/flint-water-crisis-fast-facts/>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-to-help-flint-water-crisis_us_569e8e78e4b0cd99679b9541

Liturgy

Call to Worship

Jesus, we know you are from God, so tell us what to do

“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

That's impossible! No, tell us what we need to do.

“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and of Spirit.”

We don't get it, Jesus, just speak to us plainly!

*Get your head off of the ground and look above.
Don't see what is right in front of you, but what is ahead of you.*

How can we do this?

*Go back to the beginning. Go back to when the Spirit, the Wind of God,
swept over the waters. See everything through God's vision, and live into God's intention.*

For God so loved the world

*That indeed, God did not send his Son to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Christ, we confess we have watered down your teaching into a statement about personal salvation, rather than actually changing our lives to live into Your vision. Forgive us for using Your words to condemn others. Reframe our thinking, bring us back to the beginning, to see ourselves and the world in the way You intended us to see and live and work. Help us to be co-creators with You, to cultivate love and life, a life that is not about what is right in front of us, but what is eternal, so that we might live into Your vision. In Your name we pray that we would reform and reframe our thinking. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Through Christ we are given a new mirror, a new window, to see ourselves and the world. Through Christ, we know God's love is reflected in us and how we care for the earth and one another. Go, share the Good News, and reflect God's love in all you do and in how you care for others and the earth. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, call us back to the beginning. Help us to wipe the slate clean and start fresh. Call us into the ways of the Spirit that move across the waters of birth, to give new life, abundant life. Help us to do our part to clean up the water that has been poisoned. Help us to do our part to resist efforts to exploit the earth at the expense of creation and indigenous peoples. Help us to do our part to reform our thinking that the earth is not to be used for our gain, but to be cared for as You have cared for the earth and us. Help us to do our part to reform our thinking to see not the mess that is around us at our feet, but the opportunity to lift our gaze, to live into Your vision of new, eternal life, through Christ Jesus. Amen.