



Good Morning, Church!

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Change so God's Church Can Thrive

By Rev. Dr. Carl K. Ellis

I love the story where Nicodemus meets Jesus and he is told he has to be born again. Nicodemus just can't figure out how he can go back into his mother's womb and start life over. We 21st-century Christians know that Jesus is not talking about being born again physically, but spiritually. We are to be born again of God's Spirit.

Unfortunately, we struggle to be born again with the spirit of Jesus. In fact, sometimes we downright refuse to be born again because that means we have to change and look at situations, people, and how we do church differently.

To be born again we would need to forgive others and let go of our grudges. We would need to remember the words Jesus shared with Peter when he asked how many times did he have to forgive his brother and Jesus said, "Not seven times but seventy times."

To be born again, we would need to think about who we invite to dinner. Remember, Jesus ate with big-time sinners, like Zacchaeus. And more importantly, we might have to go to them rather than waiting for them to come to us.

We might have to think about our sacred customs, just like Jesus did not hold to all the Jewish norms, like working on the Sabbath, hand washing, and picking grain. What sacred customs do we need to do away with?

And we might want to understand that everyone is precious in Jesus' sight. Like the widow who everyone ignores because she doesn't give much, the children who come when we are having important classes.

Yes, if the church is to thrive, we, the people of the church, need to be born anew by being open to the Holy Spirit.

I have witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit when the people of God take the good news to the local watering hole, that is the bar, and meet people where they are.

I have witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit when the people of God open up their homes for a community meal and invite neighbors they have never ever talked to.

I have witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit when the people of God open up their church to new music that speaks to the younger generation.

Jesus tells Nicodemus he needs to be born again. We know that Jesus is talking about being born of God's Spirit.

The question we have to answer is: Will we be brave enough to be born again, to change, to grow, so we can help our churches thrive and help others to experience God's love and grace?



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