

Over the Hill

A homily preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at the Celtic Eucharist, St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, January 19, 2017

John 3: 1-8

In the name of the God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies us. Amen.

It's official today. I'm "over the hill."

I remember when my father turned 40. We threw him a large party, complete with every kind of "over the hill" decoration and gag gift you can think of. 40 was seen as a midway point in one's life. A climax. A time of existential crisis. (I can vouch for the latter). I stand where my father did thirty years ago and, surveying my life's landscape, wonder: what now? What do I want the rest of my life to look like?

In tonight's Gospel, we meet someone else who stands at a midway point. His crossroads may have nothing to do with age, but Nicodemus stands at a climax in his spiritual journey. He's not having an existential crisis. He's not questioning who he is and where he would like to be in his life. Rather he's wondering if Jesus could be the promised Messiah. He's filled with hope about this man whom he's observed heal and drawn large crowds. We might say the Spirit moves him to seek Jesus out.

And Nicodemus ventures at night. Why, John's Gospel doesn't make clear. It could be Nicodemus fears being seen and ridiculed by his peers or it could be because it's the only time to catch Jesus alone. I also suspect it might be that, symbolically, night represents mystery.

And a mysterious message is what Jesus offers Nicodemus, this business of being born again. Nicodemus has trouble apprehending it. It's as if the smooth slope of an answer for which he's been hoping gets replaced by a mountain. Maybe that's because he's taking Jesus's words at face value. Yet Jesus invites him to go deeper, restating, with just a tad more detail: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Spiritual rebirth and renewal is not a uniform experience. Sometimes it's as dramatic as tongues of fire and a descending dove. Other times we recognize it

symbolically, such as through baptism and the renewal of our baptismal covenant. Whatever form it takes, being “born again” of the Spirit most often has to do with reaching a turning point on one’s journey. It means being open, just like Nicodemus, to learning from God and letting God transform the brokenness of our lives, our hearts, and our souls so that we can be made new and whole.

Jesus did that for me when I was at my worst, and I have to say that my heart was so moved, my spirit so uplifted, that I felt like a new and different person.

Forever transformed. Each day in the journey bringing new and un-thought-of possibilities.

Jesus can guide all of us “over the hill” of brokenness into renewed faith and hope. It doesn’t matter how old we are or where we are in our lives. We just have to be open to the transformation, and give thanks when it happens.