

**Title: We are works in progress – of water and of spirit.**

**Text: John 3: 1-17**

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**Lent 2**

Some of us awake in the morning with an unquenchable thirst, others of us awake in the middle of the night with questions.

Whatever the nudge or emptiness - This is our prompt to embark on our spiritual quest. Our Lenten journey.

Not to ignore the nudge or to fill the emptiness with food, alcohol, work or sex.

‘Christian discipline is the concentrated effort to keep empty places empty’ – Henri Nouwen.

We are works in progress all of us. Complex characters always being nudged forward - asked to leave that which we are comfortable with and to take steps forward into what we do not know.

Just as it is at birth. And then each day is a birth of its own.

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Living with uncertainty (don't we know it in these days) - political, medical and economic – the discomfort nudges us.

Some of us love the call forward to the new and unknown,

Others of us resist change,

And some of us hide away.

The Christian scriptures and tradition calls us to daily change – in a word we don't use often anymore - *repentance* – that is a constant turning, adjusting ourselves each day, turning toward God... and my friends, according to Jesus, that feels sometimes like chasing the wind, for the wind blows where it wills.

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Some of us might think we are too old for this:

But then we have before us the example of Abram and Sarai - Abram was 75 when his new journey began and they left everything and turned to follow and turned to follow... and turned...

Some of us might think we are not prepared for this, for we are already established in our well-defined and institutionally powerful careers:

But we are brought face to face with a character like Nicodemus – a man who sits on religious and legal councils – who awoke in the night with a nudge -

who begins his search in secret and later in John's gospel stands out in front of his peers and asks his questions. (John 7:50-51) – risking it all.

We are all called, each one of us to be born – again and again – to bring questions and nudges out from the dark and into the light, to come to the end of our carefully worked out theories of life, to once again be vulnerable, naked, dependent before God...

We are never too adult or too old, to live into the questions and to consider a new start.

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And we are invited to be born of both water and Spirit.

Water: our identity, our baptism, our naming, our belonging.

Spirit: an everyday invitation into the unknown, metaphorically, as the wind blows.

**It's not one or the other – but a combination of water and Spirit, that makes life sing.**

- When we are born of water – baptised – we are rooted, with a clear identity.  
But without spirit we have no living pulsing trust  
No sense of newness  
Dry religion  
Without the wind, without life, a self-perpetuating loop, culture reinforced by religiosity, unchallenged.
- Spirit without water, we find ourselves drifting, following our hearts with no anchor, spiritual but not religious,  
On an individual quest, without conversation partners in community,  
No sense of accountability,  
In our heads – alone.  
And we need the structure and the container of a community.

In one of Canadian author Douglas Coupland's books, *Life after God*, a collection of short stories, some set in North Vancouver, he tells of a man named Scout. Not unlike Nicodemus, he is looking for something more. A commentary on the life of Generation X – Canadians born in the 1960's and 1970's.

Scout remembers his childhood:

As suburban children we floated at night in swimming pools the temperature of blood; pools the color of Earth as seen from outer space. We would skinny-dip, my friends and me . . . . We would float—pretending to be embryos, pretending to be fetuses—all of us silent save for the pool filter. Our minds would be blank and our eyes closed as we floated in warm waters, . . .

Ours was a life lived in paradise and thus it rendered any discussion of transcendental ideas pointless...

Life was charmed but without politics or religion. It was the life of children of the children of the pioneers—life after God—a life of earthly salvation on the edge of heaven. Perhaps this is the finest thing to which we may aspire, the life of peace, the blurring between dream life and real life—and yet I find myself speaking these words

with a sense of doubt. I think there was a trade-off somewhere along the line. I think the price we paid for our golden life was an inability to fully believe in love; instead we gained an irony that scorched everything it touched. And I wonder if this irony is the price we paid for the loss of God.

The short story unfolds as Scout traces the life of each of his young friends. Into what became of their lives – complex and always unfolding - and becoming what they didn't expect.

Scout expresses his surprise, his disillusionment, his sadness at the way things turned out for them.

And then he writes:

But then I must remind myself we are living creatures—we have religious impulses—we *must*—and yet into what cracks do these impulses flow in a world without religion? It is something I think about every day.

Now—here is my secret:

I tell it to you with an openness of heart that I doubt I shall ever achieve again, so I pray that you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God—that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.

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And we, who sit here week after week, may we find the intricacy of water and Spirit. Rooted in our identity as followers of Christ, held by a tradition that has given us a name and a rhythm, and words to pray.

And brave enough to live out of our questions, to ask them, not only in the darkness, but like Nicodemus bring them into the light. To let our longing draw us deeper into God and into life.

“For blessed be the longing that brought you here  
And quickens your soul with wonder.

May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire  
That disturbs you when you have settled for something safe.

May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease  
To discover the new direction your longing wants you to take.

May you come to accept your longing as divine urgency.

May you know the urgency with which God longs for you.” - John O Donehue