

***May I speak in the name of the living God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.***

I would like to begin by sharing with you a story about a young man named Paul. He lived, some years ago, in a small town in the Pacific Northwest coast of America.

He was just a small boy when his family became the proud owners of one of the first telephones in their neighbourhood.

It was one of those wooden boxes attached to the wall, with the shiny receiver hanging on the side of the box, and the mouthpiece attached to the front.

The young Paul listened with fascination as his mum and dad used the phone. And he discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device, called a telephone, lived an amazing person.

Her name was "Information Please". And there was nothing she did not know.

"Information Please" could supply anybody's number. And the correct time!

Paul 's first personal experience with "Information Please" came one day when he was home alone and he bashed his finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible and he didn't know what to do...

And then he thought of the telephone. Quickly, he pulled a footstool up to the phone, climbed up, unhooked the receiver, held it to his ear and said: "Information Please" into the mouthpiece...

There was a click or two, and then a small clear voice spoke: "Information."

"I hurt my finger," Paul wailed into the phone.

"Isn't your mother home?"

"Nobody's home but me," Paul cried.

"Are you bleeding?"

"No," Paul said.

"I hit my finger with the hammer and it hurts."

"Can you open your ice-box?"

"Yes."

"Then go get some ice and hold it to your finger."

Paul did and it helped a lot.

After that Paul called "Information Please for everything. She helped him with his geography and his math. She taught him how to spell the word "fix." She told him what to feed his pet chipmunk. And then when Paul's pet canary died, she listened to his grief tenderly and then said:

"Paul, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in." Somehow that helped and Paul felt better.

When Paul was nine years old, he moved with his family to Boston. And as the years passed he missed "Information Please" very much.

Some years later as Paul was on his way out west to go to college, his plane landed in Seattle. He dialled his hometown operator and said, "Information Please..."

Miraculously, he heard that same small clear voice that he knew so well. "Information."

Paul hadn't planned this, but suddenly he blurted out: "Could you please tell me how to spell the word "fix?" There was a long pause...

Then came the soft answer: "I guess your finger must be all healed by now."

Paul laughed. "So it's really still you. Do you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time when I was a little boy?"

"I wonder," she said, "if you know how much your calls meant to me! I never had any children and I used to look forward to your calls so much."

Paul told her how much he had missed her over the years and asked her if he could call her again when he was back in the area. "Please do," she said, "just ask for Sally."

Three months later, Paul was back in Seattle. This time a different voice answered. He asked for Sally. "Are you a friend?" the operator asked. "Yes, a very old friend." Paul answered. "Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you this," she said. "Sally had been working part time the last few years because she was sick. She died 5 weeks ago." Before he could hang up, the operator said: "Wait a minute. Did you say your name was Paul?"

"Yes." "Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down in case you called. Let me read it to you. It says: 'When Paul calls, tell him that I still say: there are other worlds to sing in.' He will know what I mean."

Paul thanked her and hung up... and he did know what Sally meant.

"There are other worlds to sing in."

That is a beautiful and powerful thought.

And that is precisely what John 3 is all about.

"There are other worlds to sing in".

In this life and, beyond this life.

When Jesus said to Nicodemus that night: "You must be born again."

"You must be born from above."

"You must be born of water and the spirit,"

That's what he meant.

We don't have to stay the way we are.

There are in a sense, other worlds to sing in.

We can make a new start.

We can have a new life.

We can become a new person.

The change in us can be so profound that it is as if we are born again.

If we look at the Gospels, I think Jesus shows us a number of ways in which we can experience this re-birth in very real and practical ways.

1. TO BE BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT,  
MEANS TO COME ALIVE TO GOD'S WORD  
INTHE BIBLE.

Nicodemus, was a leader of the Synagogue, he was someone who would have known the Jewish scriptures inside out.

He would have had a strong belief in a God of steadfast love, a God guiding his people through trial and tribulation.

However, only by reading the scriptures in the light of the Spirit, would he come to know the real depths of God's love – a love so deep that God's own Son was born on earth to live amongst us, to teach us and give us an example of how to live our lives in accordance with God's will. Only the Spirit, could open Nicodemus heart and mind to the wonder of God's love made known in this way.

## 2. TO BE BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT, MEANS TO COME ALIVE TO LOVE.

Nicodemus would have been very familiar with Jewish laws and rituals. The Ten commandments and the many other rituals and obligations relating to work, relationships, cleanliness and religious observances.

Only through the guidance of the Spirit, would Nicodemus come to see that it is not the law in itself that is important, but the things that they point to.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus on many occasions challenging us to see beyond the law and allow God's love to flow into our lives more fully. Which is more important - refraining from any kind of work on the Sabbath, or reaching out to heal the sick?

It is only the Spirit, that enables us in our hearts and minds to see that the whole law is summed up in Jesus' command to love God and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

### 3. TO BE BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT MEANS TO COME ALIVE TO ETERNAL LIFE.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that all who believe and trust in him and have been born of water and the spirit, will have eternal life.

This promise is central to our Christian faith. Jesus promises you and me, along with all those who believe and trust in him, that through our Baptisms we will share in his resurrection to new and eternal life – a joy that we can experience in this life and in the life of his heavenly kingdom.

In our baptism, we promise to turn away from all that is wrong in the life of the world, and the water is symbolic of the washing away of everything that is bad in our lives.

For many, the changed direction in life can be dramatic, like being born again.

Whether it is turning away from a life of crime, turning away from drugs, or alcohol – those who have left these things behind through coming to faith, often speak of becoming a new person – of being born again.

As Jesus says to Nicodemus:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.”

These are all big things for us to take on board and to grasp – just as they were for Nicodemus.

During Lent, let us like Nicodemus, come to Jesus in times of prayer, and study and reflection.

Let us bring to him our questions, or fears or doubts.

Let us make time and space for him to speak to us, as he spoke to Nicodemus.

Let us pray, that we may come to know more fully in our hearts and minds what it means to be born of water and the spirit, and so learn to rejoice ever more fully in the newness of life he gives us.

Amen.