week 2 of Lent : Shaped by Jesus (each week examine a way we are shaped)

-Lent= season of church cal. to prepare ourselves to d&r Jesus, to examine our own faiths, as we walk the // 40 days that J spent in desert

-Our visuals are here to remind us of this

* each week we remove one color (back and candle)
* add another way we are shaped by J
* each week our scripture shows person who have been changed by their experience with Jesus

John 3: 1-17 Nicodemus – pharisee

* often got a bad rap
* influential religious leaders of the time (religious insider)
* rule keepers of Judaism
* already not fond of Jesus

At this point J is early in ministry (wedding at Cana and temple disturbance)

But Nic had heard of Jesus -as rabbi, wise teacher from G *“No one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”*

* sneaks to J at night (embarrassed of the draw J has on him)
* N wants to know more = conversation

Confusing conversation where N moved from professed understanding to professed lack of understanding.

Language of “Born Again” 1st appears

* to us it’s common… but not to Nic
* can’t not be born from mother again
* birth as symbolic of our renewal of faith

The story ends with what J says to Nic, we don’t see Nic’s response

But I would argue that he was born again that night

Because we see Nic a few more times in the NT

* ch 7 -where Nic appears in conversation with other leaders (lawyers/ judges) in the Sanhedrin defending Jesus (asking for fair treatment)
* Nic appears after J death along with Joseph of Arimathea to provide burial assistance and embalming spices
* Nic’s transformation is not told/laid out, but we can assume from his presence at burial that he became a follow of Jesus

There were many in NT who followed J because they had nothing to lose.

* bottom of society (blind, beggar, lepper… widows, orphans)
* if following J was not socially acceptable, they didn’t care, society had already cast them out
* but Nic was diff.
  + he was a leader, a professional,
  + he would have worked his way into this passion over years
  + (unlike the young/ teenage disciples who left their fishing nets)
  + which means he wasn’t a young man
  + already in a position of authority and respect (much to lose)
* his conversion was less dramatic (calculated, deliberated, thoughtful) -similar to how many of us experience faith renewals
* while sometimes can drop what their nets and follow, many times we have moments like Nic, that have made us reconsider, changed our paths, altered our theologies

In this story we witness a moment where Nic is reborn, but I believe that these moments not limited to happen once, or only at the start of your faith journey

Nic was not at the start of faith (…) this, like our rebirths, mark the point where we are changed, correct course, or re-route

believe we are born again, and again, and again, ….

* each epiphany (conversation or scripture) can re-route us
* major life events (marriage, birth of kids, deaths, losses, trauma/joys) change our outlook and when we choose from this new point in our life to follow J we are born again, again

We can look at other characters…. see repeated conversions (born again)

2nd scripture – Genesis 12 - Abram & Sarai

* first appearance (except in genealogy)
* matter-of-factly states their calling/acceptance moment of new chapter
* similar to a born again moment
* All we know is that God said to go from your country and he went
  + We know he will become a great patriarch of the faith
  + will have moments of great faith and great doubt
  + each time will be reborn/ recommit to God
  + don’t know if this decision was hard / deliberated/ etc = went
* age 75 -God was just getting started with Abram (biblical ages are often symbolic -but not young)
* both Nic and Abram were well into life
  + God does not limit conversions, callings, new birth to youth

The apostle Peter experienced at least 5 conversions. [[1]](#endnote-1)

1. On the shores of Galilee he "left everything" and followed Jesus.
2. In Matthew 16, he confessed that Jesus was not just a rebel rabbi but the Beloved Son of God.
3. Then, after denying that he even knew Jesus, in John 21 Jesus lovingly reinstated him.
4. In Acts 10–11, Peter came to accept the Gentile Cornelius, and to affirm that "God does not discriminate against any person."
5. And finally, in Galatians 2, Paul describes how he "opposed Peter to his face" for his hypocrisy. Having been converted to accept Gentiles, Peter backtracked and later refused to eat with them. We don't know the details, but somehow Peter was once again converted to embrace the Gentiles despite some Jewish pressures not to do so.

Peter had many moments of new/re- birth, (probably more not recorded)

We could probably look through our own lives as see our twists +turns

* see our times of re-birth,
* some that happen in a moment, others over period of time
* does not just mark the beginning of our faith
* None of us can say that since we have been shaped by J, already that we are done being molded, formed, and invited to new birth again
* True belief requires lifelong conversion

We must be born again. From above. By the Spirit.

Like Nicodemus, Abraham, and Peter. Again and again, all our life long. In our thoughts, in our words, and in our deeds.

Lent is a time that specifically invites us to that.

Our decisions we make to follow J are personal and often deeply private

* but 1 thing I like about J’s choice in analogy (image of birth)
* birth is not a solitary endeavor. (yes, it is 1 woman -doctor/nurse/spouse)
* in bible times: it was a group of women, midwives, daughters, working together to see this new life into the world
* J: did not use image of path, turn,
* but image of a community event where others who have already done this (midwives were experienced women) lead others through this change
* that’s a beautiful thing (that the rebirth of our faith may be compared to the birth of a child into a community of people assisting and celebrating your arrival.

And that’s how our re-births should continue at any stage in life. We are not meant to walk in faith alone. We are here to walk together/birth together.

I encourage you/us to continue to be there for each other, to pray together, to talk about your faith together, to be midwives to each other, your friends and your family, so that all can experience the joy and celebration of being born again and again, and again.

1. Taken from www.journeywithjesus.net [↑](#endnote-ref-1)