



John 3, 14-16

[14](#) Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

[15](#) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” [16](#) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The words we have just heard from the Gospel of John are certainly among the best known in the Bible. They contain something that most people today take for granted: namely, that God loves us. But precisely because we take this love of God for granted, we have forgotten that it the same love is directed against abysmal corruption. The love of God is therefore not without pain. It is also not harmless, because it leads to the bloody execution of God’s Son on the cross. "What does such an execution have to do with the love of God?" some people ask. From this question we already recognize that the love of God travels a long way - from God, where everything is perfect and good, to us humans, where things are anything but good. The love of God that John speaks of, shows us this long journey of the love of God. And we cannot understand the love of God without this long journey.

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The path that God takes to us humans is the same for all of us - regardless of whether we are Pharisees, devout religious people or those who are caught and entangled in guilt. The words that John tells us today make it clear that we are all actually lost. We are like tightrope walkers who dance at lofty heights in the circus, but where the safety net has been removed. For a while we can dance at lofty heights here on earth. We can create many things in our world. We can even achieve great things in art, science or other areas. We can also be very pious and do good things in life. Yet we all have the same problem: we dance in this world without a safety net. And it is only a matter of time before we crash on the hard ground. We are all lost - the pious and the impious, those who believe deeply and those who do not yet know that they should believe. We are lost because we have lost our relationship with God. And because we have lost our relationship with God, we live in a lost world. This does not just mean that the world is lost, but also that we humans are losing each other. Because fellowship and trust have been lost, coldness and distance reign among us. However, we are not only losing our relationship with God and our neighbors, but also with ourselves. Because we have no stability in life and, just like the tightrope walker, we must at some point lose control and fall to the ground.

The words that John tells us today speak of a love of God that has overcome the world and wants to bring us back into fellowship with God. These words were first spoken to the Pharisee Nicodemus. He had become curious through Jesus' miracles and now wanted to know more about Jesus. Jesus points out to him the radical nature of the human situation and says to him: "Unless you are born again of water and the spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God." In the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, it becomes clear that Nicodemus initially does not understand at all what this new birth actually means. He does not think from God's perspective, where Jesus wants to lead him, but rather from his own physical circumstances. And he sums up his concerns in a stunned question: "How can a person be born again?" We are not immune to this misunderstanding either. "Born again? How is that supposed to happen?" I still feel the old Adam with all his weaknesses in my life in full force. And that even though I am baptized!

What does Jesus do with this fundamental human weakness? If he sent us home to do the homework again, there would only be more of the same misery. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, he made it clear from the outset where to begin. The first point is this: Being a Christian is a humanly impossible thing! So we cannot begin with our human condition. Reaching God is an impossible thing from the human standpoint! No one can do that. No one knows a method - no matter how spiritual or pious they are. We humans are fundamentally unfit for the kingdom of God and for this very reason must be born again. What Jesus paints before Nicodemus and us is a radical rejection of human ways of finding God. Can someone give birth to himself? No! In the same way, we cannot come to God. Jesus' answer to Nicodemus is just as impossible as his answer to the rich man when he said: "Sell everything you have and give it to the poor!" The rich man does not have what it takes. Neither do we! We humans do not have what it takes to earn eternal life. It's as simple as that! The rich man who wants to know the greatest commandment from Jesus has not come any closer to God, just like Nicodemus. Despite much effort and work, neither has made any progress. They do a lot and yet are just treading water. When Jesus asks Nicodemus: "You are a teacher of Israel and you don't know this?" this question is rhetorical. Of course he doesn't know. He can't know. He is a human being like all of us.

In his conversation with Nicodemus, however, Jesus does not want to leave him alone with his questions. What is impossible for us humans is possible for God. We cannot give birth to ourselves. But God can. We should and can become completely new people from water and spirit! By spirit, Jesus does not mean anything human, but God himself. We must be born from above. Our perspective must change completely. The source is what matters. And the source is God himself. And God comes to us humans with such simple means that we must stand there, stunned and amazed by this simplicity. The spirit of God takes simple water! The great living God of the universe binds himself to something as simple as water! When Jesus later pronounces the baptism command: "Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," he establishes what he only hints at to Nicodemus. God takes water and combines it with Jesus' word. This is how we are born again! This is how God lives in us through the Holy Spirit!

Jesus painted the offer clearly before our eyes. We cannot grow to God from ourselves! But God comes to us. And yet we see that people repeatedly reject this path of God to us. That is why they also reject Jesus. Deep down in us humans there is a stubborn rejection of everything that God is. We do not want God and will find a million reasons not to let him into our lives. We would much rather burden ourselves with cruel human laws than let God free us. "You do not accept our testimony..." Jesus says to Nicodemus. By not accepting Jesus, they do not accept God. This is the original rebellion of all people against God. That is why Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus is not easy to digest. Not for him and not for us either. No, it is actually very difficult.

What has to happen is more than a conversation at night. What has to happen is more than a few words that we can learn by heart like the ABCs. What has to happen is a radical turning point in human history. Jesus does not leave Nicodemus and us in the dark, but explains everything. Jesus must be raised on the cross. This is the radical, surgical incision that is so desperately needed.

To help us understand this even better, Jesus compares this to an event from the Old Testament. When Moses was in the desert with the people of Israel, the people were terribly plagued by poisonous snakes. This was a punishment from God. The snakes are the result of human

rebellion against God. In order to be healed, Moses had to erect a bronze snake. Whoever looked at it was saved.

Jesus wants to show Nicodemus and us that the reason for our salvation is not within us, but outside of ourselves. Satan rages in us and around us with all his poison. Sometimes he even blinds our eyes so that we can no longer see our salvation in Jesus. But how wonderful it is when we are freed from Satan and our eyes are opened.

In the Gospel of John, there is hope that Nicodemus heard these words and that they fell on fertile ground. Blessed is he if that is true. Blessed are you if the words of Jesus are in your heart and bear fruit.

Amen.