

**Sermon Notes of
Guest Speaker Nan Kuhlman's Sermon on May 30, 2021:**

"Moving from Darkness to Light (John 3:1-17)"

[In today's sermon, guest speaker Nan Kuhlman on Zoom shows us, on Trinity Sunday, that even though we all struggle with shame and guilt, we can move toward a greater understanding of God's love for us and thus be able to share that love with others.]

Introduction:

- Has anyone ever taken one of those Facebook quizzes, which are kind of fun.
- For example – “How Much of a Logical Whiz Are You?” or “What Color Light Saber Should You Have?” or “Which Disney Princess Are You?”
- Recently Nan came across a quiz on line – A Shame Test. This is where you self-diagnose whether or not you struggle with shame.
- Here are some of the questions in this quiz, and if you answer “Yes” or “Sometimes,” then you may have had an encounter with shame:
 1. It is relatively easy for me to criticize members of my family, people at work or school, or myself.
 2. I have a hard time believing that someone can fully love and accept me.
 3. I get defensive when others criticize me.

 4. I don't accept compliments very well.
 5. When I'm lost, I find it difficult to ask for directions or help.
 6. When things go wrong, I have a hard time accepting blame.

 7. I find it hard to rest or relax without feeling guilty.
 8. I feel things must be done my way.
 9. I feel embarrassed or humiliated by certain things from my past.
 10. I rarely reveal my feelings.

- At least one of those statements applied to each one of us because we all struggle with shame.
- Shame is a human condition.
- So, let's define shame.
- Author and researcher Brene Brown says that “shame [is] the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging – something we've experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.”

- Brown goes on to say that shame is often the source of hurtful behavior and that it can make us dangerous.
- For Christians, shame can mean we don't fully grasp how deeply loved and forgiven we are or that the most appropriate response to our inclusion in the relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to love and share our gifts with others.
- So now, let's look at this week's “Speaking of Life” on GCI's website.

Speaking of Life Video by Michelle Fleming, GCI Staff member:

When I was growing up, I was extremely shy. I would avoid being the center of attention to the point that I even hid in the bathroom during multiple award ceremonies to avoid the stage. My dad was a pastor, and the first time he used a story about me in a sermon illustration, I burst into tears. My shyness and self-consciousness kept me from sharing my gifts with other people for a number of years.

I think it's kind of ironic that I now frequently speak in front of crowds. It makes me think about how we all can let shame and self-consciousness keep whispering in our ears, "You're not enough. Who are you to stand up in this situation?"

Has self-consciousness ever whispered in your ear, saying, "You're not enough?" Has shame kept you from stepping up to share your gifts with the world? We're not alone in this struggle. Even the prophet Isaiah wrestled with shame and self-doubt. He writes about a vision he had where he saw God on his throne with an altar surrounded by seraphs or angels. Isaiah's first reaction is to say, I don't deserve to be here; I'm not good enough. Let's see what happened next:

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" Isaiah 6:6-8 (NRSV)

The vision shows that the cleansing of Isaiah by the angel touching his mouth with a live coal from the altar of God. This is a metaphor that shows the shift from Isaiah focusing on himself and all his perceived shortcomings to focusing on God's love and how he could share that love in his own unique way.

The vision pointed to Jesus Christ cleansing us. Thanks to Jesus, we know that our sins and shortcomings have been taken away from us and we have been made new. In his second letter to the Corinthian church Paul says this:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NRSV)

Just like the prophet Isaiah, our shame has been removed and we are freed to serve others and share the gifts that God created in us.

My younger self didn't realize that sharing the love of God with others doesn't require us to be perfect. Sharing God's love with others simply asks us to show up and love with the same love we've been given by the Holy Spirit.

Rest in the gift of freedom from shame that is God's gift to you and freely share God's love with others.

I'm Michelle Fleming, Speaking of Life.

Our theme:

- The theme for this week is “Freed from Shame”, and the title of today’s sermon is “Moving from Darkness to Light”
- We’re going to talk about how being freed from shame and sin enables us to love and serve others.
- So, sin is not so much about moral behavior as it is an issue of feeling separated from God, feeling that our struggles separate us from God.
- As mentioned in the *Speaking of Life* video, Isaiah 6 recounts Isaiah’s vision of God and how he was cleansed of his shame and set free for service.
- This week, John 3:1-17 is our sermon text that uses Nicodemus’s story to illustrate how we move from darkness to light, which is a metaphor, from bearing shame and shortcomings to sharing God’s love freely with others.
- We can think of unbelief (not believing that we are loved by God) or darkness as our shame of our shortcomings, or we can think of belief or light as our understanding that we are loved.
- That’s the starting point for our love and service to others – understanding we are deeply loved, no matter what.
- We can learn a lot about how we let go of the darkness of shame and move into the light of who we are in Jesus Christ by considering the example of Nicodemus in John 3:1-17.

John 3:1 (NRSV), Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2) He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” 3) Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

4) Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” 5) Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6) What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7) Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above. 8) The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

9) Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10) Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11 “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12) If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?

13) No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16) “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17) “Indeed, God did not send

the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

What can we observe about the text?

- Today is Trinity Sunday.
- John 3 offers the chance for Jesus to talk about all three persons of the Trinity.
- In verses 5-8 Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit.
- Verses 13-15 discuss Jesus as the Son and predict the cross.
- Verses 16-17 go back to the foundation of the Father’s love for all humanity and the lengths he would go to break the bonds of shame so all might know their worth in God’s sight.

John 3:1, Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”

- In the gospel of John, there is recurring theme of darkness and light.
- Let’s look at John 1:1-5 (NRSV):

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2) He was in the beginning with God. 3) All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4) in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5) The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

- Darkness and light are metaphors for unbelief and belief
- The New Testament writers used many literary techniques.
- Notice in verse 2, the Pharisee Nicodemus came to meet with Jesus at night.
- Though we can only speculate, we can assume that he was moving toward believing that Jesus was sent by God (i.e., from unbelief or darkness to belief or light).
- Nicodemus points out that “no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.”
- Nicodemus is beginning to have a shift in his understanding about who Jesus really is.

3) Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” 4) Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?”

- Jesus takes advantage of the dual meaning of Greek word translated “from above” which can also be translated “again.”
- Let’s notice that Jesus lets Nicodemus’s confusion grow; He doesn’t resolve the tension or misunderstanding of Nicodemus.
- Sometimes God lets us wrestle with things and allows us to sit in our lack of understanding, knowing that as we continue to wrestle with truth, it will change us.
- This will spur us toward greater growth.

- In our transformation of life, we can't skip the hard and difficult parts.

5) Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6) What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7) Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8) The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

- Wind is obviously a metaphor for the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus takes a spiritual concept and talks about it in physical terms so that we will be able to understand.
- We can feel wind which shows us we can feel the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus contrasts our fleshly human response (which is often shame-based) with the Spirit's freedom, moving "where it chooses."

9) Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10) Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

- Nicodemus had a hard time understanding because Jesus was deliberately being vague.
- And today, we don't always get a clear cut answer to our questions about things occurring in our life.
- Our wrestling helps us go back to what we do know, which is that God is good, that we are loved, and that we are never alone – God is with us.
- These are the three key points of understanding we need to have.
- There are other examples where God's way of moving in the world was completely different than what people expected.
- Remember when Sarah laughed at the thought of having a child when she was old, and when Zechariah did not believe the angel when the angel said Elizabeth would have a child, who was John the Baptist.
- We need to temper our scriptural knowledge with the understanding that God is also a mystery and that our human ability to comprehend spiritual things is limited.
- We have to be OK, while not knowing the things we want to know about.
- So, we don't always understand why certain things happen to us.

11) "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12) If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

- The first "you" is singular with Jesus addressing Nicodemus ("Very truly, I tell you").
- The second "you" (those not receiving the testimony) is plural.
- We can speculate that Jesus was referring to the Pharisees in general, but maybe we as modern readers are also implicated.
- Do we refuse to believe when we cannot understand exactly how God is working in a situation, or do we go back to what we do know – that God is good, that we are loved beyond our comprehension, and that there is nothing we will ever go through where the Father, Son, and Spirit are not with us every step of the way?

13) No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14) And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15) that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

- Jesus makes a reference to his crucifixion by talking about Moses “lifting up the serpent in the wilderness.”
- This goes back to Numbers 21:9 when the Israelites were traveling to the Promised Land and were bitten by snakes.
- The way they were healed was to look upon a bronze snake statue that was put on a pole.
- Jesus compares the healing of the snake bites to the healing of our feelings of shame and being separation from God.
- The way we are healed today is to look upon Jesus.
- Jesus on the cross took away our pain and shame.
- God heals of our shame and also ultimately our suffering.

16) “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17) “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

- Verse 16 is one of the best-loved verses, yet it isn’t complete without verse 17.
- Jesus came so that we could be included in the relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Verse 17 says that God didn’t send Jesus to condemn or shame the world, but to break the feelings of shame and separation that make us feel far off from God.
- Though we all struggle with shame, as we grow in our understanding and belief in God’s great love for us, we can let go of feelings of unworthiness and embrace ourselves, imperfections and all, as beloved children of God.
- Then, we can share that wonderful love of God to others.

Application of these verses in our lives:

- First – recognize that shame affects us all and keeps us from sharing our gifts as well as God’s love with others.
- Researcher Brene Brown says that speaking about shame helps to decrease its power.
- So when we focus on the high value God has placed on each individual, we can be freed from its hold.
- Secondly, remember Nicodemus’s story.
- Moving from darkness to light, from shame to love’s freedom, doesn’t happen all at once.
- By the end of our passage in John 3, we don’t hear any more about Nicodemus, so we might assume he just ran off into the night.
- But Jesus had given him a lot to think about, and while we don’t know exactly what happened, we can see by Nicodemus’s actions that he did believe Jesus enough to honor him with Joseph of Arimathea by bringing a large number of spices to bury Jesus’s body (John 19:38-42).

- Nicodemus, as a Pharisee, took quite a risk by doing this, given the culture of his day.
- So we might see this as evidence of his move from disbelief, shame, and cultural constraints to a life of love and freedom in Christ.

- And thirdly, remind yourself of your true identity.
- Consider taking this approach when any shaming or negative thoughts come up: respond by replacing the shaming or negative thought with a biblical affirmation.
- For example, if you have recurring thoughts of past failures, think on **2 Corinthians 5:17**: “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!**” (NRSV).

- Though shame is a struggle for all of us, the story of Nicodemus shows how we can move toward a greater understanding of God’s love for us and the inherent value and worthiness he has placed on us as beloved children.
- We need to remember that the way we think is transforming.
- By embracing the freedom we have to be imperfect yet loving human beings, we gift others with permission to do the same.

Closing prayer