Look back over your life – was there ever a time where you felt you were stuck in a rut? Going through the motions? Everything in your life seemed routine. Day after Day. Same thing over and over again.

You lost that inner drive, that enthusiasm that allows you to look forward to what’s coming next. Your life seemed to lack direction.

Maybe that’s how you are feeling right now.

Now, I’m not trying to be a real downer here, but seriously, what I’ve described can happen to anyone, often times it happens over a long period of time and we find ourselves in a situation where we feel stuck and unable to climb out of it. It can affect every aspect of your life.

What about our jobs? Remember when you first started a new job, it was exciting, but over time, it can became routine and just became (pause) a job.

Over time, you may feel worn out or burnt out. As I’ve shared with many of you, that was how I felt. I would think to myself, “If I could only take a break, a brief sabbatical, I would come back revived and refreshed, excited about my job again”.

This can also happen in a marriage. Marriage can become stale, repetitious. I hope this does not describe your marriage and I really hope you didn’t just look at each other as if to say “yep, that’s us, stale and repetitious.”

However, sometimes conversations can become short, limited in content and often times combative. Spouses are going through the motions and the motivation to keep making it work just isn’t there.

For our students, especially our graduates, this can happen in school. The enthusiasm just isn’t there anymore, especially this time of year, and it is time to just move on.

And (pause), the same thing can happen in our religious life, with our relationship with God. Just going through the motions. Everything seems routine, personal prayers are starting to sound the same. You just don’t have the motivation or drive to maintain your readings and prayers like you use to. God seems so distant.

Where’s the motivation, where’s the enthusiasm we once had? What do we need to do to feel that excitement and inner drive again? To feel those moments of joy we once had.

In today’s scripture reading, we are introduced to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a Jewish leader and teacher of the Law. Due to his status and his reference to being old, one can assume that he is an older gentleman and has experienced much in his life. We can only imagine what his life was like. Was he experiencing the same things I described earlier? Has his relationship with God become stale? Has he drifted away from God and was just going about his duties?

Then something happens. Jesus comes to town and Nicodemus hears him speak and sees and hears about the miracles being performed and he is intrigued by what he hears.

He decides to visit Jesus, but only at night – why then? *(Typically, the Jewish leaders went out of their way to confront Jesus, question his motives, or ridicule him in public.)* One can assume he didn’t want to be seen and questioned for his motives for visiting with Jesus.

But why was he there? What was he seeking? Was he desiring a new direction in his life, did he want to receive what Jesus had to offer? Was he struggling with what he believed and taught and what he wanted to believe?

You can imagine the inner conflict he may have been dealing with as a Jewish religious leader and wanting to believe that Jesus is who he said he was.

And so, the conversation begins . . . “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” He seems awe struck and amazed of Jesus’ teaching and the miracles being performed.

**3** Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

Nicodemus just couldn’t comprehend what Jesus was telling him. Have we experienced that in our own journey with Christ? Finding it difficult to understand what God is trying to tell us or fully comprehending something we read in the scriptures.

For Nicodemus and maybe even ourselves, something was holding him back and he wasn’t ready to hear the message.

Was it pride, stubbornness, or maybe fear of how what would happen if he chose this new direction. How would it change his life? How has it changed our lives?

Jesus went further by saying “no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and born the Spirit”.

Let’s look at this for a moment . . . .What did he mean by being born of water? What’s the significance?

Water is a symbol of life, it sustains all living things, all life depends on water. (Speaking of water . . I know we need the rain, but right at the beginning of the last night’s service, lighting struck very close by and our electricity turned off for a couple of seconds and came right back on. I don’t know if that was a sign from God since I was preaching, but my nerves definitely spiked)

Water is also a means of cleansing and purification. It’s an important part of baptism, which represents the cleansing water of God washing away our sins and starting our life anew.

What does Jesus mean by being born of the Spirit? To be born of the Spirit means having the Spirit of Jesus Christ living inside of us. It’s having God’s gracious love living inside our hearts. It’s knowing that God is with us at all times. This is done through the Holy Spirit. Many may not have understood that at the time Jesus was among them, but today we have a clearer understanding of the importance of the Holy Spirit and the role it has in our daily walk with Christ.

So, what does it mean to be born again and what was Christ trying to get Nicodemus to understand?

When we first accept Christ and ask him to come into our heart, we experience a rebirth like no other. But, I also see it as those times in our life when we recognize that we’ve distanced ourselves from Him and we reach out to Him and ask Christ to dwell within us, to take away our sins, to get us out of that rut we are in, to rejuvenate us.

A rebirth, starting over, changing our focus from the everyday responsibilities and routines to putting God first. Putting Him first positively impacts everything aspect of our life, our job, school, marriage, and our relationship with Christ.

I remember my baptism. I grew up in an American Baptist Church and was baptized at the age of 12 on Palm Sunday 1974. I understood that “that” was the moment when I was “born again”. I went under the water, symbolizing my sins being washed away, and as I rose out of the water, I was a new person. I felt the Holy Spirit enter my body (at least I thought I did) and I was changed forever, ready to live my life for Christ and to be obedient to his teachings.

Honestly, it felt great and I did feel different.

It’s the same feeling our Confirmands experience when they stand on this altar and profess to this Congregation that they believe – they believe in the Father Almighty, Jesus Christ his Son, the Holy Spirit and pledge to live their life for Him. A powerful moment in a young Christians life. That feeling of rebirth, new direction in life.

Little did I know that once I graduated from high school, left home and went to college, that my faith would be different. I became independent and didn’t need anyone else, including God. I could do it all on my own, and I started putting space between God and myself.

Then something happened, I felt his presence and God pulled me back. I realized what a fool I had been and rededicate my life to Him, I was “born again” all over again. How often did this occur in my life? When have I needed to ask God to come back into my life, seeking forgiveness for denying him, praying for guidance as I reconfirm my covenant with Him? More times than I care to count. But, each time, I felt a rebirth happen and the stale, routine, mundane, unfocused life I was living was redirected. And I feel a joy that can only come from having Christ, the Holy Spirit working inside of me.

As for Nicodemus, he appears two other times in the book of John and many scholars believe that his actions showed that he did accept Christ and was “born again”.

I end with this thought . . . at the end of today’s scripture we read the most significant passage, one that has had a big impact on this world - 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.

As Jesus taught . . . no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.

So, it is my hope and prayer that you too have experienced a rebirth, that you will seek His forgiveness, invite Him into your heart and that you are allowing the power of God, the teachings of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit live and work inside of you and lead you to a life of fulfillment and joy. Amen

Benediction:

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the unconditional love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen. (II Corinthians 13:14)