

# Holy Trinity Sunday

## STARTING OVER

John 3:1-17

## The Holy Trinity

By Steven E. Albertin

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2He 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." 3Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4Nicodemus 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?" 5Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8The 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." 9Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14And just as Moses lifted up the

serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,  
15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16For 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.

17Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Letting Go**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Regrets***

All of us at one time another have wanted to start over with the things that we have messed up in our lives. I am sure that LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers wants to start over after his team lost in the NBA Eastern Conference finals last month. I remember many times in school, when I didn't get the grade I wanted on a test, I wanted to start over. Have you ever stuck your foot in your mouth and said something really stupid and you wanted to start over? How about the promotion that never happened, the argument that got out of hand, the car that turned out to be a "lemon"? Didn't you want to start over?

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *I Don't Believe It's That Bad!***

STARTING OVER . . . is also the subject of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. He comes to question Jesus secretly at night, suspecting that Jesus has something he might need. He gets more than he anticipated when Jesus tells him that he will never see the Kingdom of God unless he completely starts over. He must begin a new life, be "born again/from above." It is clear that Nicodemus doesn't understand what Jesus is talking about. He thinks that Jesus is talking about a literal rebirth. But that

is impossible! How can he be born a second time?

Most of us, when we think of starting over or having a second chance, think of making slight modifications. We would not mind making some changes or improvements in what we already are. Starting over means doing things a little bit differently the second time around, making a few adjustments here and there, so that things turn out better this time. But we are sure that starting over could not possibly mean changing ourselves so completely that it would be as if we were born all over again a second time. That kind of change just isn't necessary for good folks like us. As a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus probably felt the same.

Surely, Jesus can't mean what he says! Surely, he can't mean that we must still, in spite of all these good things we have done, start over?! Surely our lives couldn't be that bad so that Jesus would have to demand that kind of change? How can he make demands like this? Who does he think he is, God or something?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** : *Yes, It Is That Bad!*  
Jesus can make these kind of demands and expect this kind of change because he is God and our plight is that bad. By refusing to believe him and his demand to START OVER, by refusing to let go of the life that is perishing, we don't get the opportunity to START OVER. We don't get "eternal life." Yes, it is that bad! And our restless and endless search for any relief short of completely starting over, i.e. death, is a sign that we are always under divine judgment and always in the process of perishing.

## **PROGNOSIS: Taking Hold**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Starting Over*  
But what we cannot do for ourselves, God does for us.

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

“God so loved the World that He gave his only Son” over to the fate we deserve.

When Jesus was lifted up on the cross, He gave up his chance to start over so that we might have the chance to start over. When he is lifted up from the dead at his resurrection, God offers us what we can never attain for ourselves: a fresh start, a new beginning, another birth, a new life. Our regrets are forgotten. Our mistakes are left behind in Jesus’ grave. Our sins are forgiven. Such an opportunity to start over is not a mountain to be climbed. It is not a game to be won. It is not a status to be achieved. It is simply a gift to be received. It is a promise to be trusted.

**Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *I Can’t Believe It’s That Good***

Wow! I can’t believe that it is that good. But it is. When that promise is believed, a new life begins. We get to start over. We can let go of everything that would bury us in the past. As we face the future, everything else simply doesn’t matter when compared to the fresh start God is giving us. We can “let go and let God.” We can admit our mistakes, confess our sins, stop having to justify ourselves, and start over.

Because Jesus was “lifted up,” so are we. It is like being “lifted up” by a cool breeze on a hot summer day. It suddenly blows across our tired faces with its cool and refreshing life. As Jesus reminds Nicodemus, the wind blows where it chooses. You hear the sound of it, but you do not know from where it comes and where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. So it is with everyone who receives the life giving love

of God. You can't control it. You can't earn it. You can't deserve it. You just receive it. It happens to you. You trust it. It washes over your body at the font. It touches your lips as you eat and drink at the table. It lifts your spirit as you hear its good news. It strengthens your body and soul as you are embraced in the arms of other Christians. You receive the starting over that you always wanted.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Taking Hold of the Trinity***

Every day we can start over, have a new beginning, let go of our old life and take hold of the new. Every day of our regretted past can be left behind. The creator of this whole universe lifted up his only Son on the cross, lifted him up again out of the grave on Easter and lifted him up into the heaven where he can sit at his right hand and fill the universe with his love in the power of His Spirit.

A cool summer breeze has touched us Nicodemuses of this world. We have been loved by a love that is like no other. We have been given a fresh start, no questions asked. We have received such a new beginning not from flesh and blood but from the source and ground of all that is. There is only one way we can talk about that loving God. We have to talk the language of the doctrine of the Trinity. A God who is this good must be the Trinity, three in one, one in three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We may not be able to explain the Trinity, but aren't we glad that God is the Trinity-who gives us the chance to START OVER?