

Rev. Beth Dickerson
Lake Street Church

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Spiritual Genetics

John 3: 1-10

(Start by explaining what's going to happen next week as the congregation chooses the Transition Ministry Team.)

I suspect more than a few of you found your theological panties in a knot this morning as you listened to the John 3 conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. And I admit I chose this scripture this morning to be provocative. I know that this is not a "Jesus" church and I know that many in the congregation have spiritually expanded their horizons to include beliefs different from Christianity. I find myself theologically stuck on the part of the text where Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be "born again."

This particular text has served as foundational for "born again" or "evangelical" Christians – those Christians who are, for this church, the antithesis of who Lake Street Church wants to be identified with. It's quite clear that Lake Street Church focuses on the community of faith rather than on individual conversion to faith. I contend though that this difficult piece of scripture gives us a jumping off place to explore how mature spirituality develops in a never-ending way that is a life-long process, rather than a one-time experience.

Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus is that we must be born of water and spirit.

Being born of water – our physical birth from the life-sustaining amniotic fluid of the womb – is a no-brainer. We get that. We were all born of water. When we were born physically of our parents, we know we received their genetic material. When my mom was living at the Presbyterian Home here in Evanston, employees and residents alike, upon meeting me for the first time, often remarked, "Oh! You

look just like your mother.” People knew just by my face who I was there to visit. My mother and I genetically looked very much alike.

Being born of the spirit however, takes a bit more of unraveling. I assume that most of you will agree with me that one simple response to an “altar call” does not automatically make one a spiritual person. That begs of question of what exactly is being born of the spirit. How do we discover our spiritual genetics?

After years of struggling with determining my own theological genetics, I am now identifying myself with “Process Theology.” One of the tenets of Process Theology is that spiritual development is an open process, continually exploring and influencing the relationship between the individual and the Divine. A core belief is the possibility that the future is open not just for us but also for God. What we are doing and how we are acting, determines God’s response to us. God is constantly at work in the world inspiring us to be partners in creating a better world. Process Theology also embraces the idea that God’s revelation comes to people from other cultures and spiritual traditions and not just to Christians. We people of the world are working together to create the Reign of the Divine here on earth.

I’ve only been with you all a little less than three weeks, but I want to speculate that I have been observing Lake Street Church embracing Process Theology. This church sees faith as an on-going adventure with a Spirit greater than yourselves – a Spirit constantly by your sides challenging you with new ways of looking at things and doing things. As you all well know, at LSC the Spirit is called by many different names and by many different kinds of imagery. This is consistent with Process Theology, with a belief that the Spirit is non-stagnant, constantly trying to communicate with all of us in various ways. The God of Process Theology tries to reach each individual in whatever way is most accessible to that particular person. Sometimes that is through worship, but certainly not always. It can be through

music or food or friends or meditation. The Divine is not just in the sanctuary but in our offices, our kitchens at home and down on the beach. The Divine Spirit at this church is accessible at anytime, anywhere and is moving in and among us, always in very different ways.

There are many other tenets of Process Theology that I certainly embrace. Some of these are:

- Doubt is part of our spiritual journey.
- All living things are in relationship to each other. Every creature – animal, plant, or mineral – has a minimum level of responsiveness to its environment. Consciousness is the tip of the iceberg.
- The future is open-ended and we have a role in shaping the future.
- The Divine Spirit is constantly interacting with the universe.
- Our experiences influence or change the Divine Spirit
- Our prayers matter. In an interdependent universe they unconsciously shape the experience and environment of those for whom we pray, creating openings for grace and healing energy.

I believe we are always in the care of the Divine and that God is always present and moving in our lives. Sometimes we miss the cues as the Spirit of the Universe is trying to influence us. No problem. The God of Process Theology doesn't give up on us. This Power, greater than anything we can imagine, will find another way to get through to us, nurturing our growth. The Universal Spirit embraces our imperfection and even our unbelief.

Exploring and developing Our Spiritual Genetics is a life-long process. Maybe we know we've been born of the spirit when we start to look, act, speak and move through the world like the Spirit of the Divine would... loving, serving and doing justice. As we work on the process of being born of the Spirit, whoever or

whatever the Spirit is for you, we are likely to start bearing a striking resemblance to the Universal Spirit that embraces all of us. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have someone look at us and say, "I recognize you. I can tell that you are a child of the Spirit." At Lake Street Church we know we are born-again over and over and over again. We thank the Spirit of the Universe for the opportunity to learn and grow forever.

Blessed Be