

## REPAIR, REPLACE OR REBIRTH

Not long after Dima, my son-in-law, emigrated from Belarus, I told him that there are three things that he needed to know about.

The three things are ..... duct tape, WD40 and bailing wire.

I pointed out that if something is stuck, then use WD 40. If something is loose or broken, then duct tape or bailing wire will fix it.

I said that almost anything can be repaired with those three things.

I wish life was so simple.....

Moreover, the sad reality is that fewer and fewer things can be easily repaired.

I have box full of spare parts, which includes parts from coffee makers, and even motors from old cassette players. When something broke, I'd try to fix it or keep the working parts for future use.

Some of those old fragments are more than 30 years old.

I don't think they'll survive the next move..... because most household "stuff", these days, is not made to be repaired.

Filling garbage dumps and buying new is such a waste, and a toll on the environment.

Fortunately, some things can be restored or made to work.

I still have two orange weave lawn chairs that I bought in 1976.

With wire and duct tape, they are still surviving,..... well mostly.

However, if Leslie has her way..... they may not make the next move, either.

Sometimes,..... an item just can't be ... or isn't worth fixing.

Sometimes broken means really broken, and an alternative is needed.

This condition can happen in the non-tangle realm, too.

There may come a time when our theology or our world view no longer works, and there just isn't enough WD40, duct tape or bailing wire to keep it going.

Pretending all is well... is only possible for a while,... and "pretending" is a huge and heavy burden to bear—a burden that tends to make people more rigid and mean.

Replacing a coffee maker is one thing. Altering our very being and perception is quite another.

I imagine Nicodemus was wondering what was wrong with his life—why his formula / his answers were not working. I bet that he knew something was wrong. He felt it. He felt the need for change.

Many thought Jesus was simply another, the newest, itinerant teacher to be in vogue – the next hero who was going around making bold promises.

Yet something was different with Jesus. Amazing things were truly happening. Healing was happening and lives were changed, .. and people were taking notice, including people in high places.

Nicodemus was part of the ruling elite; he sat on the Sanhedrin, the authorized judicial body. He was a man of position and success in life, and he was an esteemed religious leader.

No doubt, the Pharisees were curious about Jesus, and often talked about him. Jesus was creating a stir. Nicodemus was aware of Jesus' fame and reception by the masses, and it likely prompted some concern,... and it pricked at his curiosity.

In addition, it seems apparent that Nicodemus was searching, too.

In the cover of darkness, Nicodemus decided to search out Jesus, to discover more about him and his message. This was a personal quest.

Bold inquisitions are done for all to see. Doubt and confession is usually admitted discreetly.

Nic approached Jesus, and addressed him in a proper and formal manner, but added the very personal observation, saying, "Only someone who has God's spirit could do the things you do."

Before he could submit his question, Jesus answered it.

Was Jesus just rude????... or..... was Jesus disarming the formality, and responding to the question written all over Nicodemus' face? ????

Jesus answered, "YES, YES, No one can see the kingdom of God without being born anew."

*The Greek word implies both born anew and born from above, suggesting that this is some sort of amazing metaphysical phenomena.*

Jesus' declaration hit Nicodemus square between the ears – it touched his deepest anxiety.

Without thinking Nic responded, "How can anyone be born after grown old?" In other words, I am mature and up in years, how can **I be the change** and become new?

He quickly recovered, and tried to mask his emotional self revelation with the practical question, "Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

But his first question of "How can I find newness and how can I have a renaissance at my age", still lingered in the air.

Again Jesus began his declaration with the profound YES, YES, known as AMEN, amen... which can also be translated, verily, verily.. or very truly.

We normally use Amen as an exclamation statement at the end of a sentence, and that is why it is not translated Amen, Amen.

The declaration "Amen" is like putting the message in bold font and with an underline.

And, Jesus said to Nic, Amen, Amen, of course you are born of the flesh, but to experience kingdom living / God's domain here, now and always, you must be born spiritually. Don't be astonished by this, it is really rather basic,... and note, just as you didn't control your physical birth, you do NOT have control over the spiritual birth, either. It is not a matter of more duct tape and bailing wire, nor is it a self re-creation based on new insight or logical deduction.

The rebirth is not our doing. Living God's way is more than an intellectual discipline.

The wind blows where it chooses, you hear it and feel it, but you can't control it, nor do you know where it came from.

And, so it is with being born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus stammered in reply, "How can these things be?"

Jesus, answered, "Are you an esteemed leader, and yet you do not understand?"

That is a nice way of saying, "I don't think you're as ignorant as your question implies."

Nicodemus' struggle revealed that he understood more than was comfortable to admit.

And keep in mind, Nic was a very religious person.

We tend to have the misperception that being born again only applies to the "heathen" or those who are outsiders.

The exchange with Nicodemus shows us otherwise.

We may be astonished to learn that this message is for us.

We church people generally think the Nicodemus dialogue is for someone else, and that we present John 3:16 for others to see.

But, this message is for you and me! We are invited to share the foot prints of Nicodemus, and we are invited to see our darkness / our brokenness... and the light before us and to respond to being born anew.

When a baby is naturally born it is because the time is full and it is the time to be born. No one can exactly predict when birthing will begin or how long the process will last. It may be brief or it may take a very long time.

And, for the baby, being born likely feels like dying. The baby is leaving a warm, moist, cozy safe environment, ...granted an increasingly cramped and confining world, but it's the only home the baby has ever known. And, the process can be scary, and it usually brings tears, tears of surrender—surrendering to the arms of a yet known,..... loving mother.

To the more mature, being born "from above" seems like dying.

And, the timing is like the wind – it is beyond our reach.

It may be a quick new birth..... or it may take a long, long time.

Either way, the full realization of the birth brings tears because it is scary; it is new; it is beyond our control, and it is like dying, dying to the old and familiar,.....albeit broken... world that once seemed comfortable.

Being born anew ...requires surrender – surrender to the yet.... fully realized love and grace of God. – surrender to unfolding "new" God's domain.

And, notice both births come out of darkness.

Which reminds me of a story:

There was an expectant Amish father, pacing the floor in the middle of the night, waiting for the doctor to arrive.

Finally, in the nick of time, the doctor comes into the house and makes preparations for the delivery. The father asks, “what can I do to help?” The doctor hands him a lantern, and says, “You can hold this up so that I can see.” And, soon a baby is born, and he announces, “It’s a boy!” The father steps back in relief, but suddenly the doctor calls to him, “hold that light closer” and proceeds to deliver another baby, and announces, “It’s another boy.” Again, the doctor tells the father, “Bring that light closer, I think there is more and behold, he announces, “It’s a girl.” And, again the doctor instructs the father, “Bring that light closer”

The father, hesitates and asks the doctor, “do you think that this light is drawing them out?”

Nicodemus was in the darkness and was drawn to the light – Jesus, ... yet the presence of the light / affirming or admiring the light does not bring new birth. There is more to it than that. Fully encountering Jesus opens our eyes to a new way of thinking / of perceiving the world. Yet, it is God’s Spirit of love and grace that enables us to not only believe, but to also live the new way / God’s way.

We can assume, based on Jesus’ additional comments, that Nicodemus left holding onto to his old taped and wired theology and world view. Maybe he went home and tried to get it working with a spray of WD40?

I know that sounds silly, but I’ve talked to a lot of people who have **adamantly** defended a frozen solid theology that is held together with more and more spare parts... that they keep attaching,.... insisting that it works.

Just the other day, I was confronted by somebody who was upset that my views were different than his. If his beliefs were working well for him, then why would he need to defend them... or feel threatened by another opinion??

He held, what he called a literal view of the Bible,.... which is really a vain attempt of having certainty in life. I raised some questions, .... and in return heard more layers of duct tape applied to old worn out parts.

Generally, I tend to have more questions than answers, .... but maybe that’s okay.

However, I do know that people do NOT need to repair, replace **or defend**... something that is working well for them.

And, every summer I tell Leslie, “I think that old orange lawn chair just needs some more wire and tape.” She’d counter that we never use it because it keeps falling apart, and to that I firmly respond, “I can fix it.”

That old chair, for the most part, looks like a chair,.... but since it won't hold any one,.... I suppose it is not really a chair anymore.

Well,..... I hate to admit it, Leslie,.... but it truly is broken and can't be repaired.

Our lives, our understanding of life, of God, of creation of relationships is far more complicated than a lawn chair,..... yet.... too often we know our system is broken / we sense that our beliefs are not working.... and either we try to repair the old.... or in some cases... replace it.

A lot of people give up on "religion" / give up on God.

A couple of weeks ago, CBC radio did a report about a growing group of pastors who have become atheists..... merely because their theology was broken.

They decided to cast it all away and replace it with.... "Anti-religion", in other words,.... I don't need it anyways.

That is exactly what happened to a good seminary friend of mine. This past year, he quit pastoring and declared he was an atheist.

He once argued the Baptist mantra, "Once saved always saved."

I wonder how that is working for him now?

And, I don't think salvation is spliced together with absolute axioms, at least..... that is not how the wind blows.

Right now, my friend is experiencing a sense of relief because pretending that something is working when it is really broken is very taxing and depressing. In fact, trying to use... over and over again, something that is broken,... can make a person mean.

I told my friend that you may not realize it yet, but you're closer to being born anew than you've been for a long, long time.

When we admit / confess that our belief system / our futile attempts of controlling life is broken,.... then we can breathe in deeply God's Spirit.

We can not construct God's way of living, nor can we repair a broken life. Putting together a great systematic theology is like painting a picture of a car. It may look nice, but it won't carry passengers. Moreover, we can not start again. We are physically born only once.

The only workable alternative,.... is what Jesus presented to Nicodemus: which is receiving God's Spirit that opens up to us a new domain / a new birth / a new way of being..... and breathing is not a one time endeavour.

We must let go what is broken—breathing out,... and breath in God’s Spirit....., .... and the journey continues..

Each day is new, as is our growth and potential in God’s way / God’s domain.

Abram and Sarah discovered the surprise of new possibilities from what seemed impossible. Their old way of thinking was broken, but not God.

A closing observation: babies don’t all look alike when they are born, and that’s okay. I don’t think we all look a like when we are reborn either, and that’s okay, too.