

**The Rev. Dr. Mary Barber**

**Lent 2 - 3.1.26**

I am (repeat). Somebody (repeat).

This is the famous call-and-response line that Jesse Jackson used in the early 70's and into the 80's. He called out to people who had been forgotten and left behind, reminding them that they were important, they were loved, they had power, they mattered.

He would say, I may be poor, I may be on welfare, but I am somebody. On Sesame Street he said to the children on set, and watching on their sets, I may be small, realizing that children often feel invisible, that children often feel like adults are talking around and over them instead of with them. He said to the Sesame Street kids, I am Black! Brown! White! I speak a different language! But I must be respected! Protected! Never rejected! I am God's child! I am somebody!

When Jesse Jackson, the reverend, the politician, the builder of coalitions, when Jesse died last week, we got to see clips of him saying these lines. We got to reflect on how in a way this call-and-response sounds sweet and quaint today, and also fresh. Because we still need to hear these words. I am somebody.

We so need to hear today that we count, we matter, that we are seen and heard. How much some of us need to hear that, right now, when traumatizing and triggering files are being released, when we hear reports of other files being suppressed. How must the many survivors of Epstein and his associates be feeling in these times, how must the many many survivors of child abuse, of sexual violence, be feeling. We so need to hear today, in these times, that the vulnerable are somebody, that women and children are somebody.

You must be born from above, Jesus says to Nicodemus, in today's Gospel. Jesus and Nicodemus are having a theological discussion, they are engaging in God-talk in their nighttime meeting. And Jesus gets a little saucy, and Nicodemus seems a little confused, just like the disciples often are with Jesus. I don't think we should let any of that distract us from the message. We are born from above. We are water and spirit.

Jesus in his saucy way is trying to reach Nicodemus with a deeply hopeful message, a message of affirmation.

You are not just from here, you are from above.

You are not just flesh, you are spirit.

You are a part of every living thing here, and every so-called nonliving thing. You are a vibrating wave, a spinning particle, you are energy and consciousness. Your vibrations affect vibrations happening on the other side of the planet. Your thoughts float and drift and bounce off of spaces in the next galaxy.

You are born, again and again. You are born from above.

In Lent, we hear a lot of prayers and readings and songs that ask us to focus on our sins. Here in today's Gospel, Jesus is asking us to focus on something else entirely. To think about our eternal nature, our connection to the divine. Our connection to each other and to everything in this world.

In Lent, we are asked to focus on our sins. And for those of us living today, we hear that as our individual sins. Of course, we all have those. Jews in Jesus' time might have thought first of something else. Most of the time in the Hebrew Bible, sin is about collective sin, about how the people as a whole did not act with justice and integrity, how the community did not protect the poor and the widow and the stranger.

And isn't this something many of us have been thinking about lately. Asking, how did we get to this place of such division, such violence, such baldly hateful speech? Asking, what is our part in letting it get this way? Asking how have our comforts, our separateness from each other, our social media, our buying habits contributed, how are they continuing to contribute to all this mess?

Yes, some of us have been thinking about collective sin, about the responsibility that lies with us all. And that is real and valid and worth contemplating this Lent. But it is not what Jesus is talking about, in today's Gospel.

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

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world. Jesus does not want to focus on our sins, individual or collective, today.

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

Jesus is talking about salvation. But not the salvation we usually hear preached and discussed. He does not say, so that you, Nicodemus, or you sitting out there might be saved. Jesus is talking about the salvation of a whole community, collective salvation, the salvation of the world.

We have sinned, we have drifted apart from God and each other, we have fallen away, together. And we will get saved, we will get reconnected to God and to each other, together.

We are all from above. We are water and spirit.

We are a part of every living and every nonliving thing. We are vibrating waves, spinning particles, we are energy and consciousness. Every one of our vibrations affect vibrations happening on the other side of the planet. Every one of our thoughts float and drift and bounce off of spaces in the next galaxy.

We are all connected. We will get saved together. And so everything we say and do and think matters. Everything our neighbor says and does and thinks matters. Every time someone hurts, it matters to us. Every time we send out healing into the world, it helps, somehow.

You are water and spirit. You are born from above.

And so we must keep saying the words Jesse said. We must say them to ourselves and to each other.

I am. Somebody. I am! Somebody! I am! Somebody! Amen.