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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

November 24, 2013

*"I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to see God's kingdom."*  
John 3:3 (Common English Bible)

It is always amusing to me when I am seated next to someone while taking public transportation and they ask, "What do you do?" Upon finding out, the questioner usually gets very nervous. Some years ago during my ministry in Pennsylvania, I was seated on a charter bus of elementary-age school children. I volunteered as a parent chaperon for a class trip to Baltimore. Another parent seated next to me asked the question. Some weeks later I received a note from her. She wrote that as soon as I told her that I was a pastor she thought, "I am on the bus to hell!" Within the month she was a member of the congregation I served.

I am sorry that those unaffiliated with any church have such a low view of the church, its members and pastors. I question if perhaps it's the church's fault. It seems rare today to hear anyone speaking about the Christian faith in a winsome, joyful manner. If there is any faith witness at all it usually involves an index finger pointed straight out. I have never much cared for a finger pointed at me. I imagine that you don't either.

What is interesting about this passage of scripture from John's Gospel is the presence of an index finger pointing straight out: "I assure you." For those who are paying attention it is enough to make you nervous. The difficulty for church members is that we can't huddle together safely in our sanctuaries grateful that the index finger is pointed to those outside. It isn't. The index finger in this scripture is pointed right at the church; pointed at people who feel smug that they have been baptized and therefore have nothing to worry about. Jesus speaks a confusing language – Jesus is saying that we are to be born anew if we ever hope to see God's kingdom.

What Jesus is really talking about is incomplete baptism. Incomplete baptism is saying you believe in Jesus Christ but nothing changes in your life. Your behavior doesn't change, your speech isn't more gracious and building wealth is more important than generosity. Simply, you haven't been "born anew." Baptism is more than saying a few words and getting a little wet. Baptism is a commitment to a life change. The index finger is pointing straight out. I wonder if you are in front of it.

*Forgive me, heavenly Father, for neglecting any responsibility to grow in my faith. By Your Holy Spirit grant me both the wisdom and strength to live differently than before because of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Doug Hood