

“Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again". I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (v3-6)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (v16)

I don't see too many of you wearing face-masks today. Obviously you are not too worried about Swine flu. Maybe if we were in church in Melbourne today we might all be sitting here with masks on. And we might cancel the passing of the peace, communion and morning tea as well to avoid infection! It's easy to make light of sickness and death, we Aussies are good at that, until it affects us. The boys from "The Chasers' War On Everything" might not have used children in a cancer ward for one of their stunts this week if they had a niece or nephew with a terminal disease. Sickness and death are not funny, especially when it is us or someone we know of who is sick. It was sad to hear of the death of Dr Chris O'Brien, the surgeon who used to appear on RPA. He succumbed to the very disease that he operated on others for. But he could not cure himself. Despite all our advances in medical science we can't cure everyone, and in the end we all die from one disease or another.

Imagine having access to a vial that contained the cure for every known disease – Swine flu, Bird flu, AIDS, meningococcal, heart and brain disease and cancer..... Imagine a medicine that was an antidote to death itself, promising to bring you back to life even after you die. Imagine a treatment that could guarantee eternal life. In today's Gospel Jesus says it exists, and it is his to dispense from God. In fact it is why he came to this earth. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (v16). “The Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life”.** (v15)

Eternal life is yours and mine for free. You don't have to be referred by your doctor, you don't need a prescription, you don't need health insurance for it. All you need is faith, simple trusting “putting the hand out to receive it” faith. Faith in God's gift of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus who died to forgive your sins, Jesus who took all our sins and infirmities and sicknesses and weakness in himself on the cross and died with them and for us, but then was raised to life. Our sins and sicknesses and the death we deserved could not hold him down. He was raised above them to new life, also for us. Everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. That's the promises of God our loving Father who gave up his own son so that you and I and our sons and daughters might live, live through sickness and death, live with God now and live with God after we die.

A man called Nicodemus heard about the life-enhancing and life-giving miracles Jesus was doing so he came to Jesus, searching for this life, life with God now and life with God after he died. He knew he needed connection with God if he was to truly live.

Now Nicodemus had good genes. He was a Jew. He was of the right people. He was also intelligent and respected in church circles. He tried hard to keep the rules and do the right thing. But he sensed it wasn't enough to give him real connection and life with God. **Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."** To enjoy eternal life with God, to live in fellowship with God now and after we die requires something radical. It takes nothing less than a spiritual rebirth. A new inner disposition or orientation towards God. A new life needs to be created within us.

Jesus explained **”no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.** “It takes more than a dose

of kindness or a few good deeds to deal with our sins and the death they deserve. It takes a miracle from God. It takes a special washing away of our sins by him. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit.

Parents give birth to children who are like them, a precious wonderful gift from God, but also self orientated rather than God and other people orientated, just like us. We pass on the same terminal disease of sin to every generation and it shows itself in each one of us. Only God can bring about a new birth, a new life in us from above, from him. Only God can give us eternal life. We can't create it earn it or deserve it ourselves. Just as you didn't decide to be born you don't decide to be reborn. It is a gift, a miracle, just like your physical birth. It is the gift of God in baptism.

And baptizing babies is the clearest demonstration of God's loving kindness, his grace. Sometimes people wonder if we should baptise babies. Some people think we should wait til they are old enough to decide for God themselves. But children inherit the same terminal disease we all have, the disease of an inner nature that is turned away from God and turned in towards ourselves. If your child had a terminal disease and you knew there was a cure, would you make them wait til they are 18 and can make their own decisions, or would you take them to where the cure could be administered, and then tell them as they grow up what a miracle they have experienced! That's what parents do in baptizing their children. They bring them to where God can give them a new birth and the gift of eternal life.

Levi received that rebirth, that treatment for sin, that medicine of eternal life, that antidote to death today as he was baptised. He will still sin. He will still get the flu, and yes one day he like us will die. But the promise of Christ in his word today is that since Levi has been born again, this time of water and the Holy Spirit, he is already part of the Kingdom of God, he already has life saving faith, he already has eternal life. Can you think of a better way to face life, face sickness, face death, than to know you already have another life, and eternal life.

Levi can begins his life knowing how it ends, knowing that all along the way God's Spirit is in him and Jesus is with him to sustain his eternal life with God, whatever happens. At the other end of life I visited Jean in Ashford on Friday. 99 years and 11 months old. She is realistic that even if she gets over the line to 100 next month, her time on earth is not forever. But she knows her eternal life has just begun. So those who know her know she enjoys and makes the most of this life with God but looks forward to the rest of it – forever in heaven.

And that same life, eternal life is there for you again today in the word that forgives you, in the water of your baptism, in the bread that is Christ's body, in the wine of his blood at communion. The ancient fathers called the Lord's Supper "the medicine of immortality." In a moment you will receive another dose of that life giving and life sustaining medicine, to keep your new life in Jesus Christ alive.

If you are searching for God, and life with God, look no further than Jesus himself. Whoever believes in him has eternal life. Remember your baptism, or consider being baptised so that God can effect that eternal life change in you. And come to his table to eat of the food of eternal life, Jesus himself.

Whatever ails you today (and all of us live with something) remember the secret of eternal life its found in Jesus. Remember you been born again by his life creating and life sustaining spirit, washed of sin. You live and die in his protective care, immunised against any power that sickness and death may threaten you with.

Every day, even through your sufferings, your failings, your weaknesses, your sins, you can know that you are loved by the Father, through His Son Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And in that love of God, you will live forever.