



SIEBENQUELL

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# **No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above**

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In the Gospel of John there is a marvellous night-time conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. At one point Jesus says something very important, even if it sounds rather cryptic to our ears.

»Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God  
without being born from above.«  
(John 3,3)

We should be born from above. But what does that mean?

We humans live from our sources. We draw our views, attitudes, and actions from them. Here Jesus reminds us that these sources will not be enough if we want the fullness of life. For this, we need to find the wellsprings of heaven, because they give rise to completely different views, attitudes, and actions. If we only stick to our sources, we will miss out on the fullness of life. But if we draw from the sources of God, then we can be born to a higher and greater life and look at our existence

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and our human experiences from a new perspective. From what comes from above, from the open sky, we will hear and recognise what is transient and what is eternal, what is important and what is insignificant, what is life-giving and what is death-bringing.

There is a scene in the great Canadian classic »Who has seen the Wind?« that can help us understand the meaning of these words of Jesus.

The hero of this story is Brian, a boy growing up on the Canadian prairie. One morning he goes to school and the teacher, Miss MacDonald, a terribly strict woman, and rigid Christian, asks the children which of them washed their hands this morning. Brian, who normally does this every day, forgets at that moment that, for once, he didn't do it that morning. Unthinking and absent-minded, he too raises his hand. Miss MacDonald walks past his desk and sees the dirt on his fingers. She accuses him of lying. Then she humiliates him as punishment. She calls him forward, forces him to raise his arms and show his hands. Now I shall let W.O. Mitchell continue the story:

»We'll just have you stand like that,« said Miss MacDonald in a kindly voice, »with your washed hands for all the class to see. We don't want to have you think - it isn't punishment«, she hastened to say. »The Lord punishes little boys who don't wash their hands and then say that they did.«

»His head bowed, his face burning, filled with utter shame, Brian stood with his arms up, and the offending hands turned out to the class. He raised his head and saw that every eye was upon him. . . . He saw several children lean forward to tap the pupils ahead, to whisper and to point at him. . . .«

»Miss MacDonald was an efficient woman who looked for results; a strapping was fruitless, she felt, unless the child broke down, and stood red and sodden-eyed before her; the more hiccups and tears, the more effective, the punishment.«

Eventually Brian breaks down. At first he does not tell his mother what happened to him at school. However, he begins to have nightmares about the god who punishes little boys who tell lies and wake up screaming in the night.

Miss MacDonald is a woman who only draws from her sources. This is where her morals come from, but also her theology, which degrades God to one who punishes little children who forget to wash their hands.

Brian's mother, Mrs O'Connell, goes to see the teacher. She tries to reason with her, but quickly realises that this is a woman who is so convinced of the righteousness of her position that she will never see the error or mistake of her actions. She only draws from her own well. And again, I'll let W.O. Mitchell's words speak for themselves.

»I feel that I was quite right«, said Miss MacDonald positively; she was not a woman afraid to back her conviction. . .

Maggie O'Connell got up. »In a way, I came here to help you. «

»To help me!«

»Yes. Before I came - I thought you were a bad woman. You're not. You're a good woman, I'm afraid - a right woman.«

»A right - «

»You've never been wrong, have you, Miss MacDonald?«

»Why - certainly - I - «

»No - you haven't the imagination to be wrong. You must be a very unhappy woman.«

Miss MacDonald does not have the imagination to be wrong. That's why she can't imagine that she needs more for her life, that the promised fullness of life is still to come. She believes herself to be in possession of the truth and cannot imagine

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that she does not already know everything, that she cannot do everything. That is why she is not open to what comes from above, to a source other than the one she already knows well enough.

May we become people who have the imagination to be wrong. Jesus believes in our decidedly personal journey through life and all the transformations it will undergo. Tenderly and gently, he will focus on the humble truths of our first, tentative steps of transformation, rather than being fixated on whether we have already reached the distant end goal. After all, he is always more interested in whether we are in the process of being born, of entering into life, than whether we are already born.

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