

Sermon Notes

Reformation Sunday, October 25, 2026

John 3:1–15

Preaching Theme: The Spirit Is Still Reforming Us

Reformation Sunday can easily become a celebration of something God did **then**. John 3 invites us to ask what God is doing **now**.

Nicodemus represents someone deeply rooted in religious tradition who nevertheless recognizes that God may be doing something he does not fully understand. He approaches Jesus at night and begins a conversation. Jesus invites Nicodemus beyond certainty and toward transformation.

“How can these things be?”

This question can become the heart of the sermon. Nicodemus does not understand what Jesus means by being born from above. His first response is not certainty—it is a question. The church often fears questions because questions can challenge what feels settled.

But the Reformation itself emerged from people asking difficult questions about the church, authority, Scripture, grace, and the Christian life. Faithful reformation requires us to continue asking questions.

What have we mistaken for permanent that God may be calling us to reform?

The Spirit cannot be controlled

Jesus says the wind blows where it chooses. There is freedom in this image.

The church does not possess the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not confined by our institutions, denominational structures, traditions, buildings, or theological categories. We recognize the Spirit by its movement.

This provides an important connection to LGBTQIA+ people and the church. For generations, LGBTQIA+ Christians have testified to God's presence in their lives even when parts of the church refused to recognize it. Their lives, relationships, ministries, leadership, faithfulness, and testimony invite the church to pay attention to where the Spirit is already moving.

The question is not simply:

“Will we welcome LGBTQIA+ people into our church?”

A deeper Reformation question is:

“What might God be teaching and revealing to the church through LGBTQIA+ people?”

The continuing journey asks:

WELCOME — Who is being invited?

INCLUSION — Whose voices and gifts are shaping this community?

CELEBRATION — Whose identities and lives are named as gifts within God's beautiful diversity?

ADVOCACY — Where are we willing to act when our neighbors' dignity, safety, and rights are threatened?

BELONGING — Can people recognize that this community is truly theirs, too?

Invitation

Reformation is not only about changing institutions. It is about allowing ourselves to be changed by God. Like Nicodemus, we may not understand where the conversation will lead when we first approach Jesus. We may arrive carrying certainty and leave carrying new questions. We may discover that something we believed was settled needs another look. We may hear God's voice through someone whose story we had never considered. And we may discover that the Spirit has already moved ahead of us.

The Spirit is still moving.

The church is still being reformed.

God is still creating something new among us.

The question for Reformation Sunday is whether we are willing to notice—and whether we are willing to follow.

Bible Study October 17, 2026

Text for October 25, 2026

Reformation Sunday

John 3:1–15

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”^[b] ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You^[c] must be born from above.’^[d] ⁸ The wind^[e] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you^[f] do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.^[g] ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”^[h]

Scripture

Read **John 3:1–15** together.

Pay particular attention to Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus about being “born from above,” the movement of the Spirit, and Nicodemus’ question: **“How can these things be?”**

Reflection: The Spirit Is Still Reforming Us

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. He is a religious leader, someone who knows the traditions, teachings, and expectations of his community. Yet something about Jesus has stirred a question within him. Nicodemus recognizes that God is doing something through Jesus, but he does not yet understand what that something is.

So, he comes with questions. Jesus does not give Nicodemus an easy answer. Instead, Jesus invites him to imagine that God may be doing something new: “No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Nicodemus struggles with this idea. “How can anyone be born after having grown old?” It is a wonderfully human question.

How can something established become new?

That question feels particularly appropriate on Reformation Sunday. The Reformation reminds us that the church is not a finished product. Our traditions, institutions, theology, and ways of being community are continually being called back to the grace of God and opened to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Reformation is not simply something that happened more than 500 years ago.

God is still reforming the church.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Spirit is like the wind. We can hear it and experience its movement, but we cannot control where it comes from or where it goes. The Spirit refuses to be contained by the boundaries we create.

That can be unsettling. Like Nicodemus, we can become comfortable with what we already know. We can become comfortable with the language we have always used, the traditions we have inherited, the people we expect to see in our pews, and our assumptions about who belongs.

Then the Spirit moves. For many LGBTQIA+ people, the church has not always felt like a place where the movement of the Spirit could be trusted. Scripture, tradition, theology, and church structures have sometimes been used to tell LGBTQIA+ people that who they are is incompatible with faithful Christian life.

And yet the Spirit keeps moving. We see the Spirit moving through LGBTQIA+ people who have faithfully shared their stories. We see the Spirit moving through congregations willing to listen, learn, repent, and change. We see the Spirit moving when communities move beyond simply saying, “Everyone is welcome,” and begin asking what **inclusion, celebration, advocacy, and belonging** actually require of us.

The Reconciling in Christ journey is part of this ongoing work of reformation.

Becoming RIC is an important public commitment, but it is not the completion of the journey. The Spirit continues to invite us into deeper relationships, new understandings, courageous advocacy, and a more expansive understanding of the body of Christ.

Sometimes that means discovering that language we once used no longer communicates the welcome we intend. Sometimes it means listening when someone tells us that a church practice creates a barrier to their full participation. Sometimes it means recognizing that LGBTQIA+

justice cannot be separated from racial equity, disability justice, gender justice, economic justice, and the many intersecting realities of our neighbors' lives.

Questions for Reflection

1. Nicodemus approaches Jesus with questions. **What questions are you carrying about faith, church, identity, or belonging?**
2. What traditions or assumptions can make it difficult for communities of faith to recognize when the Spirit is doing something new?
3. Where have you witnessed LGBTQIA+ people helping the church understand God, Scripture, community, or faith in new ways?
4. What is the difference between **changing simply for the sake of change** and being **reformed by the movement of the Holy Spirit**?
5. Where might your congregation be called to move beyond welcome toward **inclusion, celebration, advocacy, and belonging**?
6. Who is missing from conversations about your congregation's ministry, leadership, worship, and future? What might change if their voices were centered?
7. Jesus compares the Spirit to wind that cannot be controlled. **Where do you see the Spirit moving in the church right now?**
8. What is one thing your community may need to reconsider, release, begin, or reform so that LGBTQIA+ people and all God's beloveds can more fully flourish?