

John 3:1 - 17 - 21

“Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus 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 apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus 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?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind 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.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a 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 do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Genesis 12:1 – 4a Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God, our Father, who sent the Light, through God’s Son Jesus Christ that we might have faith both in the times of joy and in our times of darkness. Amen.

Today we shift from the gospel of Matthew to the gospel of John. Remember how the Gospel of John begins, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” John wrote purposely to bring people to faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God and that life comes through His name. Throughout John’s gospel the author seeks to reveal who Christ truly is – to make him known to all people.

The next four weeks gospel lessons from John are often referred to as the discourse. In each lesson we will find Jesus in some sort of encounter with a person or persons who have some level of faith or understanding of whom Jesus is and yet are not completely sure who He is. Through conversations with these persons and his actions Jesus seeks to enlighten people as to who He is and what is offered through believing in Him.

Today we hear about Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews, who comes to meet with Jesus in the dark of night. He says to Jesus, *‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.’* So it appears Nicodemus is possibly coming on behalf of the Pharisees in his beginning ‘we know’ implying more than one person. When I thought about that it made me pause. I had often thought Nicodemus came in the dark of night because he didn’t want his temple co-workers to know he was curious about Jesus. Maybe he did come on behalf of a group or maybe he just came for himself but used the ‘plural noun.’ It also made me wonder about why John’s author had Nicodemus come in the dark. What if the use of the darkness is more than that? Think for a moment about the joyous, happy times in your life. Now, consider for a moment those times in your life when you have faced the biggest challenges, the hardest part of your journey. In which of those times were you more likely to call out to God? I know I’m not as quick to say, “Thank you, God, this was an amazing day!” as I am to turn to God, when the chips are down with my desperate plea of “Please God, do something to make this better, I don’t know where else to turn.” What if John has Nicodemus come in the dark to help those seeking faith see that Jesus is reachable in the dark times of our lives? God shows up, actually never leaves us, even in the darkest of times. Remember when the angel showed up to Joseph, who is contemplating quietly dismissing Mary as his betrothed – it was in a dream, more than likely at night. And it is also in a dream when the angel comes again to Joseph telling him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod’s wrath in which all the young children would be killed.

As a Pharisee Nicodemus is a learned man who understands God’s law and would know the scriptures. He has some knowledge of Jesus – he knows he must be a teacher. Jesus’ response is rather like saying, ‘Yes, but there is so much more. One can’t see God’s kingdom without being born from above.’ Through the conversation Jesus attempts to help Nicodemus see that one isn’t just born of water but also of Spirit. He says in so many words, that he is the Son of God. The prophets foretold of the coming of the Messiah, something Nicodemus would have an awareness of, and yet he doesn’t seem to really understand what Jesus is telling him. This visit with

Jesus in the dark of night is a moment on Nicodemus' journey of faith when he must decide does he believe what Jesus is telling him, does he want to continue to learn more? Jesus is offering eternal life to those who believe, is Nicodemus willing to come on the journey?

I took a couple journeys this past week – one was an Adirondack RR Train ride, and the other was largely virtual. I received an email from my brother with a link to the role out of a new drone at the company my nephew works for. You may wonder how a drone company has anything to do with Nicodemus but bear with me. My nephew works for Brinc Drones, a company founded in response to the 2017 Las Vegas shooting that is committed to deploying drones & other technologies that benefit communities and help save lives. As I watched a video about the release of Lemur 2, a drone that provides law enforcement safer access to buildings in risky situations, I began to think about the amazing journey of the company founder, Blake Resnick, a young man who was on Forbes 2022 30 Under 30 Social Impact list. What a journey his life is already. Surely, he didn't just one day wake up and know all he knows about drones or how to go about finding millions of dollars in investors. It is a journey, a series of life experiences, an inquisitive mind that I suspect is brilliant and risk taking, always looking and moving forward.

For Blake and all of us, life is a journey. Who each of us is today came about because of the life journey we have taken – the families we are part of, the places we have lived, the schools we attended, the experiences – good and bad, that we have had, the risks and leaps of faith we have taken. And yes, faith is a journey. One encounter with Jesus may not be enough for Nicodemus to fully understand the message Christ is bringing, which we find in the verse AFTER our gospel lesson, *'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.'* John's gospel gives a glimpse of Nicodemus' journey. In Chapter 7 we find the Pharisees sending the temple police to arrest Jesus, which they don't do because the crowds listening to him believed he was a prophet and some that he was the Messiah. When the police returned to the temple it is Nicodemus who defended their actions, saying, *'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it.'* At this moment Nicodemus was willing to hear more before condemning Jesus. We encounter Nicodemus again at the time of Jesus burial. It is Nicodemus who joins Joseph of Arimathea, to bury Jesus' body. Nicodemus brought 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes to prepare the body. Nicodemus, it would seem continued to listen and learn about Jesus and his faith grew at least enough that he was willing to take the

risk of standing up to the other Pharisees, and to invest his money to purchase the myrrh and aloes and provide compassionate care of Jesus body.

Through his encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus seeks to reveal himself and to help us understand eternal life. Our faith journeys – individually and congregationally, like all of life’s journey, are not one stop destinations, but rather a gradual growing in faith. That journey usually begins with our baptism when we are anointed and welcomed as a child of God. It is nurtured through the reading of our Bibles, attending church, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, confirmation classes and fellowshiping with other believers. We are fed at the Lord’s table and practice prayer. It is also nurtured when, like Nicodemus, we ask questions, when we doubt and are unsure and so seek to find answers. Faith is not a destination that we arrive at – it is an ongoing relationship with Jesus, our Lord and Savior, right up until the moment when we take our last breath before being welcomed into the heavenly kingdom.

Similarly, our congregations are on a journey in relationship with Christ. Trinity has a long history – a journey of being church for the people of this region that has grown over time; I’m sure encountering Jesus in many ways; there have been struggles – I was here on behalf of LDR after your flood – as well as many joys. Think of the babies and children baptized in this place, the first communions and confirmations, weddings, and celebrations of life. What a story we might hear if the walls could talk. This journey continues today as we listen for God’s voice and call to mission in this time and place. Just as Abraham and Sarah answered God’s call to “*go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you...so that you will be a blessing,*” we are called to go forth and share the good news, ‘*that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*’ This is a promise for all. Believing is the key. Christ extends the invitation to reach out, to wonder and listen, to seek the Lord and find how and where Christ impacts our daily lives and to follow. We are asked to continue to grow in faith. May your Lenten journey continue to grow and strengthen your belief that you may see the light of Christ shining in the darkness and know that the darkness can never overcome the light of Christ.

Amen.