

Lent 2, Year A  
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Genesis 12:1-4a    Psalm 121    Romans 4:1-5, 13-17    John 3:1-17

Night is a cover for many things; in John's gospel, night can signify a time of unbelief, ignorance, and temptation. Some rabbis say that it is best to study Torah at night, when the pressures and noise of the day have quieted. Nicodemus going to see Jesus under the cover of darkness. Perhaps he did not want his friends and peers to see him. For us, maybe darkness is those deepest parts of ourselves that we do not want anyone to know or to see. And we, too, have questions for Jesus.

Nicodemus is a learned man, a Pharisee, leader of the synagogue and faithful to the laws of Moses. "Jesus," he says. "We know that you are a teacher who has come from God." It is good to start a conversation, even such an unusual one, with a statement of honor and recognition. These are peers talking, rabbi to rabbi. Jesus' answers make no sense. "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above?" We are all in God's kingdom ...

This exchange is not the intellectual sparring about the law that Nicodemus thought that it would be. It is a very strange conversation. Nicodemus and Jesus are

talking, and *they are speaking different languages*. Nicodemus speaks about physical birth; Jesus answers with words about spiritual rebirth, into new life that comes from God through that spirit of creation, the same spirit that hovered over primordial waters.

Oh, that spirit! As Jesus says [that spirit] 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.”

Nicodemus drops his intellectual approach when he says, “how can this be?”

We stand alongside Nicodemus in not understanding what to think of spiritual rebirth and a breath that blows through our life at its will.

The mystery of faith as we articulate it is that (say it with me):

Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

There is a lot of mystery in between those few words. When we are talking about faith, there is always mystery left over, as Nicodemus discovered on a particular dark night. When the Holy Spirit enters our lives, something is going to happen, and we do not know what the “something” will be – except that we will be led or pushed or pulled into a closer relationship with God.

Our job during Lent is to put ourselves in places into which the Holy Spirit can breathe new life into us, in whatever way we need. When we gloat over what we have given up and how we have failed in our attempts to do so, we are speaking the wrong language. Lent is about preparing for what God does for us and not what we are doing for God.

What are we doing for God? We are walking the way that Jesus has already trod. We can repent of our deepest sins and examine the darkest parts of our lives because Jesus has already been there and nothing will keep Love from retrieving our sorrow or shame or sin from that darkness and destroying it forever. Nothing!

Nicodemus shows up two more times in John's gospel. Nicodemus stands up for Jesus when the crowd wants Jesus arrested for what Jesus preaches and proclaims in the Temple. It is Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who take Jesus' body, wrap it with spices in linen cloths, and place him in a stone hewn grave. Here, Nicodemus is identified as "Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night." Something changed for Nicodemus that night.

What will change for us in our Lenten journey? We do not have to approach our faith "at night," with unbelief, ignorance, and fear. We do not have to hide our

innermost selves but give them to Jesus. Let the Holy Spirit breathe new life into us! And we are not facing shame dishonor by observing Lent; many friends and peers are with us. When we do seek out Jesus with our questions, we will discover that Jesus has already found us.

Walk in faith, dear friends, on this holy journey. Fast, pray, and give alms, sharing your gifts and abundance, honoring God, and recognizing our starvation for the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. Let your Lenten disciplines take you to places in which the Godhead can transform your life, pouring blessing upon blessing into all of your being. Like Nicodemus, keep showing up, praising and serving Jesus. *Amen.*