

## John 3:1-21

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He 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 the signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 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?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The 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." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 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. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven, except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness, so must the son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 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. 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.

## I

Last week we met Jesus with Satan in the wilderness. This week we are meeting Jesus with Nicodemus, and we are meeting him at night. So I imagine Nicodemus sort of silently stalking through the streets by moon light. Maybe, trying not to be seen by others that he is headed in the direction of the house where Jesus is staying, probably especially hoping that none of his Pharisee brothers see where he is going. I imagine Nicodemus encountering Jesus in a quiet yard next to the house, or on the rooftop where they might find some privacy.

And finding himself in the presence of the Lord he has a question on his heart, but he doesn't ask his question. He makes a statement: "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." Now this is an interesting way to start a conversation, because who is this we that Nicodemus is talking about? Obviously it isn't the other Pharisees, their stance is to be incredulous at everything Jesus does. Maybe it's a small cadre of leaders who are secretly being transformed by Jesus' teachings, or maybe it's just Nicodemus and his family. In any case he starts off by stating his faith such as it is, that he knows Jesus must have some connection to God because of the signs that he has seen.

But Jesus perceives that he really does have a question in his heart, and even if he doesn't have a question, he gives him the answer to the question that Jesus thinks he should have in his heart which is: Tell me more about this kingdom of God. Where can I find it? How can I be a part of it? Is it here... is it coming? And Jesus says, "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Now there is a pun here that is lost in English, but in the Greek the word for above, anōthen, can mean either again or from above. So we get the confusion: Jesus says you must be born anōthen and Nicodemus wonders how you can be born again, when Jesus is really saying you must be born from above, or in other words, reborn from God and the Holy Spirit. And Jesus, being a good teacher, clarifies that the entrance to the kingdom comes through the dual baptism of water and the Holy Spirit. Water being the outward visible sign of the invisible Holy Spirit that enlivens people to follow Christ.

For his part Nicodemus continues to be confused about what he is hearing. But Jesus continues teaching, eventually coming around to the fact that all of this is really about God's love "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."

## II

When I think of Nicodemus meeting Jesus in the still of the night, in a quiet conversation by moonlight, I am reminded that this is how I really met Jesus too, at night. What I mean is that this meeting reminds me of that common experience of lying awake at night, staring at the ceiling with all the questions of the universe running through your mind. Do you know that feeling? I really remember it as a kid thinking about things like outer space and infinite time until my head started to hurt. But it was

also in these night time moments that I would contemplate God. And where I met God the night my Grandmother died, having awoken in the night and knowing what had happened I entered into deep prayer, meeting Jesus in my bed at night.

I remember reaching out to God at night when I would question my faith, and wonder if God really was there and if the stories of Jesus were true. But it was also in the still quiet of night where I learned to meet God night after night in prayer until I couldn't even go to sleep without making my mental trek over to Lord's house for a quick moment of prayer. I used to pray myself to sleep like this.

You know Nicodemus meets Jesus at night, and it might be the only night time meeting recorded in the scriptures, but in my mind, night time has got to be one of the best settings for meeting Christ, especially with questions like Nicodemus had, because when else do we have a quiet moment to turn our thoughts toward God.

In my house from the moment I wake up we are moving. The dog has to go outside, then eat breakfast, then the kids have to eat and get ready for school, and I have to get ready for work. Then I come here where I have a beautiful pastor's study, but with kids constantly playing in the gym or on the playground and phone rings and doorbells, it ain't quiet. Then it's home in the evening where the kids want attention, and the dog needs walking and something needs fixing, kids finally go to bed. And we probably watch TV for another hour. But then the TV and the lights go off and finally it's just me and my thoughts. Now in the still of the night I can meet Jesus again.

### III

Nicodemus had the right idea. That is to say that you've got make time, silent private time, which is most likely to happen at night, but it could happen at any time. Nicodemus found an undistracted moment in which to come meet Jesus, and I find in that a word of life for me. An encouragement to seek a silent private moment for me to not only *find* time, but to *make* time to meet Jesus.

Let me tell you, I am the king of filling the silence with everything else, TV, Radio, Iphone, Ipad, I think I might be addicted to things that distract my attention. So it really does take an effort to make the appointment, to take the time to walk down the moonlit streets of my mind to meet with one who is always waiting for me to knock on his door.

Meeting Jesus at night is about asking ourselves the question, how do we make time for those private meetings with the Lord? How can we be intentional about knocking out some of the noise in our world so that we can hear a word from God? Where is your nighttime meeting spot?

Lent is famous for being the season of giving things up, but it can also be a time to pick up something new. And nothing would make a better Lenten practice than to simply make quiet time for a conversation with the Lord.

#### IV

The good news for us is the same as it was for Nicodemus. And that is two things. One: that when we do go in search of the Lord he will be there to welcome us and listen, to answer questions and maybe have some questions for us in return. And the second part of that good news is that these quiet conversations with the Lord will often end up being for us, like it was for Nicodemus, a reminder of God's love, God's love for the world, which means God's love for you and for me. May we all find a quiet moment whether it be by night, or any other time, in which we might meet the Lord once again, and in that meeting may we be reassured that God so loves the world that God sends Jesus to meet us and in so doing gives us a moment of rebirth in the Spirit. Amen