

Matthew 3: 1 – 17 Nicodemus

We have heard it said, “There is no such thing as a stupid question.” I applaud people who actually live this idea. Without critical, questioning thinking, we shrink and cease to grow. We needed the curious, questioning minds to advance us, otherwise we could not have survived as humans. The quest to learn new things and to grow feeds us spiritually and intellectually and helps to form us.

I imagine that it is just this sort of deep, beautiful quest that drove Nicodemus to carefully and quietly move toward Jesus in the dark of the night, that part of the night when questions run rampant through our minds. The fact that he went in the night, under the cloak of darkness, tells me that he really wanted answers and wanted to have a meaningful conversation with Jesus; one that was away from the prying eyes of the establishment, where the establishment people could not judge him or classify him as a rebel. He wanted that time to learn for himself and think over what he had learned. I do not blame him. I think I would have snuck to Jesus in the night, too, for back in those days, you could be condemned for who you spoke to.

Nicodemus is really not so different than us. He is a person, who, from what we gather, spent a lot of time pondering and poring over scripture and law, and hanging out with colleagues to discuss the politics of the day.

Imagine hearing about this Jesus who has performed all these miracles;

.....turned water into wine

..... healed people,

.....who railed against the politics and money practices of the day

by overturning tables in the temple and called for worship for God alone,

.....rose people out of death,

.....spoke of the destruction of the temple and it's restoration, and

all else that Jesus did.

Nicodemus wants to understand all of this. So do we. We are just like

Nicodemus. Our curiosity about Jesus does not end. That is why we

keep reading Scripture, attending Bible study, and why we come to

Worship. This man is interesting.

And, so, Nicodemus goes to Jesus under the cover of darkness, creeping

carefully and quietly... He has a reputation and position in the

community to protect, but secretly, he knows that this man has much to teach him. This learned leader, a man of power, wants to see without being seen...to see the man who John has just told us “knows and sees what is in everyone.”

“Teacher, I’ve heard about your signs!” Nicodemus says. *I want to see, I want to understand.*

In the face of his curious excitement, Jesus peers through the darkness at him and says – rather calmly, I imagine – “No one can *see* the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus, aren’t you a religious leader? Don’t you understand?”

This very question seems to taunt us in the here and now, we religious people.

“Don’t you understand?”

We hear this question each week as we come to worship and hear the scripture read aloud. We hear this question in our minds as we read scripture throughout the week or engage in daily devotions, and every time we engage in prayer to the God who sees all things. We hear it as we look for hope amidst the tragedies of the world and our lives. We

hear it as we struggle to articulate what it means to be “born from above,” as we struggle to articulate in real and meaningful ways the gift of this water; this water into which we were born anew through our baptism.

We stand alongside Nicodemus who is, at the end of this exchange, silent in the darkness. And we listen to Jesus.

Jesus, in this darkness, becomes our center. And he pushes through our disappointment. He speaks of the wind. “It blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it...but you do not know where it comes from. You do not know where it goes. So it is with *everyone* who is born of the Spirit.”

Jesus speaks of the wind...and of the water. That deep, dark water where God meets us, where God breathes new life into dusty lungs.

Jesus speaks of these things with clarity and intensity, and then he recognizes that they are mysteries to us. God has entered the world, has met us in darkness

During these forty days, and in this story of Nicodemus, we are invited to encounter Jesus as one unknown, to embrace the mystery of God’s

love. We are invited to slow down, to be silent, to listen to the One who speaks to us through simple, earthly things: the rustling of the leaves, the softness of snow falling, the breaking of bread, the pouring of wine, the trickle of water poured in the baptismal font.

We are invited to slow down, to be silent, to listen as Jesus challenges our own disappointment at not knowing...even as he calls to us in our darkness. Where he encourages our faith, encourages our seeking, encourages us saying, “God did not send me to condemn; I save.”

Friends, we all have this yearning. “I have just heard about your signs, Jesus...I want to see. I want to understand.”

We, too, want to see. We want to understand. And, in the face of this deep need of ours, Jesus – who “knows what is within us” – Jesus is not silent. He speaks; he meets us in darkness and speaks God’s promises.

Thanks be to God.