

Message for March 12, 2017 - Second Sunday in Lent

Gospel – John 3:1-17

God is Waiting for You!

John 3:16 – for God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him will have everlasting life.

This was the first bible verse I memorized as I was blown into grace. It is like a bridge from Genesis 1:1 to my world today – from darkness through the light into the heart beat of creation. I remember dancing in circles, my interpretation of ballet pirouettes, my heart spinning higher and higher – I was encircled in an embrace of complete love. I didn't want it to stop – ever. I never wanted to experience the soul chilling cold of darkness ever again. But then the spinning stopped and I had to figure out what it all meant - an ongoing process of learning.

When I heard I would be preaching on this verse I embraced it in all its beauty, never stopping to realize it was part of a story...biblically speaking, nothing is without purpose...in our Gospel today we have Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a member of the Royal Sanhedrin – a leader of the Jews, knows the Law inside and out and holds all other Jews accountable to those laws, as well as a member of a group that often opposed Jesus' ministry. Here this man of high esteem comes to Jesus in the night. There are many possibilities here of what NIGHT represents. Maybe Nicodemus came in the night because he was just too busy in the

day with all his responsibilities, or maybe he was worried about being caught and questioned if he was seen talking with Jesus, or night is a metaphor for the times we ourselves call on Christ, and maybe it is all three, and then maybe there is a fourth, that God seeks us out in the dark...

Think of our days – if we have children we are bouncing out of bed with a coffee in one hand, trying to dress our children and getting them groomed and fed and then off to school. A stay at home mom does not mean her day is not full, and so when the children come home, neither mom has any really time for self-focus, and now is balancing children, their activities, dinner, and perhaps a husband too. A single mom and or dad's schedule is even more taxing....and dad's – grabbing a coffee as they dress, helping out with the kids if time permits, out the door, working until 4,5,6 and then helping with chores, etc....neither parent has a moment in the day to fit in extra seconds for oneself. And grandparents, the retirement years are filled often with caring for their grandchildren, and all that dreamed of down time is now filled to the brim. And weekends, well forget it, seems there is even less time, and unless you come to church, you might make it through the week without even a grain of thought for that God's stuff. Nicodemus' life may have been just as complicated as ours and so perhaps night was the only time he could go to Jesus.

Jesus said “For God so loved the world...” According to my creation story, that included all humankind, even Nicodemus.

Did you ever notice that God didn't ask the world if it wanted to be the recipient of His love. God just went ahead and loved, and then He went on to give His only begotten Son to die. God's love -- surprising, all encompassing, unasked for and undeserved -- is also given unconditionally. God loves us whether we like it or not.

How could Nicodemus not be enticed, even just a little bit about the beautiful message of new life Jesus preached – all those miracles, and a kingdom without end, no hunger, no illness – couldn't Nicodemus have been mesmerized by the hope of JUSTICE for all? Nicodemus has to have witnessed the healing of the lepers, whose lives were pure misery – much of that misery created by the Law itself – isolation, shunning, loss of family life and their livelihoods. Yet, faith, love and mercy gave them back their families and hope...did Nicodemus witness a form of justice like that he may never have known possible? Did he realize justice in action when Jesus was outraged at the injustice taking place on the steps of the temple? Maybe the Spirit was tickling his appetite for NEW knowledge? And Nicodemus knew the prophesy, that a Savior would come...I believe Nicodemus was a man moved by the Spirit, reborn with a hunger to learn about the gift Jesus was offering, if only he would be born again, of water and spirit. And, so, the only time he could make for Jesus was “after hours” so to speak and took advantage of the opportunity to have a private heart to heart with

Jesus. And maybe, just maybe his own heart was yielding to this new law called love.

What is so wrong with coming to Jesus in the night, or during life's darkness? Isn't that why Jesus came into the world, to bring the light? Wasn't darkness God's initial invitation to creation? I think back to my conversion – it was both literally in the night and figuratively in the night of my life. *I was at rock bottom, where light cannot grow, but there in that putrid, damp darkness sat my Savior waiting for me.* The night can be a time of vulnerability and questions – a time when we wrestle with our inner most spirit. Ask most children about night and many do not like it at all – that's when the monsters come out to play. Night seems to breed discomfort – Golly gee you have a sleepless night or two or three – it is as if the world has ended – could it be God calling you? But no, God is light, why ever would he call in the night. When do we call on God – when we are sick, in some sort of trouble, worried, broken...when you win the lottery, other than that “thank you Jesus” moment, when do you sit with God. I got a new car – “thank you Jesus...” We don't often tend to sit with Jesus for a real heart to heart talk in the light, but when the dark arrives – whether it be the night or our own brokenness - the moments grow, expand in to periods of time – wouldn't Jesus be sitting there just longing for you to reach out to Him, just like Nicodemus. I remember something my son said to me when he was grown – mom, I know your insomnia was a horrible issue for you, but for me it was a

blessing, because when I could not sleep, I knew you were always there, as if you were waiting for me and I could come and we could talk, and then in time I would feel a calmness and I was able to go back to bed.

For God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him would have everlasting life.

God loves this world, even the God-hating world that crucified the Lord of glory. Jesus is calling us – you and I to come and sit with Him...day or night, he awaits you, for He gave His all for that precious time with you. God did not send His son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” Stop judging yourself, forgive yourself in His presence – during these days of lent, seek the joy awaiting you in the precious darkness, embrace it.

Was Nicodemus becoming a bit undone by the Law? Was the Law becoming a bit oppressive and painful? Sometimes, just when we think we have it figured out, something happens that brings us back to where Jesus is sitting and waiting. I know often times I hesitate to come to that quiet place with Jesus – I am burdened by the wrongs I have committed, the hurts I have caused, the things I should have done and by the things I should not have done...the more I stand down from Jesus, the harder and harder it gets to find him again. I am sure it was very hard for Nicodemus to gather the courage and finally have that sit down chat with Jesus – he had a lot to lose in earthly terms...for us perhaps we have face to lose – the shame, the guilt – but Jesus has already paid for those sins...we have been blessed with the precious gift of God’s grace. It is a gift of life from the

heart of the Father, breathing the Spirit wind over us and through us – what wondrous love is this?

Light of day or dark of night, our Savior waits – He has already forgiven us, so don't let that stop you from seeking Him...talk with Him if you are weighted and burdened and let His forgiveness permeate your soul, you are free, your past is yesterday, your new life is today and tomorrow and begins anew everyday – forgive yourself so you can be free to forgive others and move into the newness of life – for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, so that whoever believeth in Him will have eternal life – you are forgiven, so go and have that chat with God and give him your worries, your concerns – He is waiting for you, feel the love, feel the forgiveness, feel the new life filled with peace, justice and love. The reality that we are so freely loved by God that He gave His most precious gift – His Son to endure the vicious suffering and agonizing death upon the cross because He desires us to be with Him throughout eternity...this is the wondrous love, this is the gift of God.

This Lent, feel the heal – light the darkness, come and chat with Christ – like Nicodemus, unburden what troubles you. Come in the light, come in the night, come in your brokenness, Christ just wants you to come and be with Him. God loves you and there's nothing you can do about it – He loves you for you, nothing more and nothing less – you are good enough – loosen the knots that keep you from God, begin the forgiveness that has always been yours – begin your conversation with Him today, in this moment – He's waiting for you.