

Openness: John 3:1-21

Norwalk Christian Church, February 22, 2015, Lent 1, Year B

Wednesday night several of us joined together to kick off our Lenten season. It was then discovered that Lent is not simply a time of deprivation, but instead a time of self-reflection and preparation, so we are fully prepared for God's calling on our lives. Just as Moses spent 40 years wondering in the desert. Just as Elijah spent 40 days wondering through the wilderness. And just as Jesus spent 40 days wondering through the wilderness, before beginning his ministry. We have 40 days to spend without our everyday distractions, reflecting on our lives and needs as we prepare to live our lives for Christ.

It is during those 40 days of examination that we have to dig deeper, well past the surface level. To figure out what actually drives us to do the things we do. And what hinders us from doing other things. That's where we find Nicodemus today, hidden in the deep dark places of his soul trying to figure out what he believes.

Nicodemus, an older Jewish teacher of the law, could not himself, do the things Jesus had begun to do in Jerusalem. In fact, he didn't know how Jesus was able to do the things he was doing. He wanted to learn more, to talk with him. But Nicodemus wasn't sure he wanted to be marked as one with Jesus. He knew God had to be on Jesus' side or else he would not be able to do all that he had done. But Nicodemus was a leader among the Jewish teachers. Being seen with Jesus could not only discredit his leadership, but potentially cost him his life. So he decided to meet with Jesus during the night, so nobody would see whom he was meeting with.

When Nicodemus and Jesus met I imagine they took their time chatting with each other. As the picture depicts on the front of your bulletin, I imagine them sitting down and talking with one another on a very equal base, just as Jesus is known for doing. I love the added touch of the lamp in this painting. For remember it is Nicodemus who is reaching into the dark depths of himself in the dark of night. And it is Jesus who is drawing out the light, bringing truth to light.

In their conversation Nicodemus seeks to learn more of this Jesus and his relationship to God, trying to figure out how the seemingly impossible is done. How this man who appears to be just like everyone else has the power to heal the sick and baffle the temple officials. And how does Jesus answer? He throws convention out the window and gives the world's most popular verse as the reason.

It's true. When Nicodemus says his works must be that of God, Jesus replies talking about being born of above, a rebirth, being born anew. Nicodemus has no clue what Jesus is talking about, he came there seeking real answers. So like all wise people who don't understand something, he continues asking questions, hoping to get it. Hoping to be able to understand Jesus' power and authority. Only Jesus' answers aren't the most clarifying. Nicodemus is trying his hardest to

wrap his mind around the concept of being born again. All struggle in their search for answers, even those like Nicodemus that are of the highest educated. Nicodemus finally realized that Jesus wasn't referring to a literal birth, but of a spiritual renewal. A renewal that makes rebirth possible. A new life that brings hope and life eternal. He is asking Nicodemus to allow God to work in his life. That is the rebirth. This new life is God's gift to us, we cannot birth ourselves. It is in this spiritual birth that God can do the impossible, and God can use the improbable.

I love the image of the wind for the Spirit. Not seeing where the wind has come from and not knowing where it is going. The Spirit can use those who have come from all walks of life and can lead them anywhere, to accomplish great things. The most unexpected of people can do the most extraordinary of tasks. God can do the impossible by using the improbable. And what can make this possible? Love. The one thing that makes the world go round, love.

It is this conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus, in the dark, that brings out the world's favorite verse. For this is how God loved the world. You recognize it best in an older translation, which was great in its time, For God so loved the world. For this is how God loved the world. He gave his only Son to save the world. Love. Love is the answer Nicodemus is searching for. It's the answer as to why Jesus has authority. It's the answer as to why things don't have to make logical sense. Love doesn't always make sense. Love can be simply that, love.

Love is our motivator. Loving others motivates us to do good for them. Loving ourselves sometimes motivates us to be better versions of ourselves so we can love others. And at other times, loving ourselves motivates us to not do good for others, but to ignore them. Love, either way we look at it, deep down in the dark parts of our souls, is the motivator for everything we do both good and bad.

During this season of reflection and preparation, let us reflect on our love for others and our love for ourselves. Truly being open and transparent with ourselves, there are times we need to put others first and allow our love for them to grow and expand and light up our world. Likewise, there are times we need to allow others to put us first, allowing their love to light up our world, bonding us together as brothers and sisters in this wonderfully beautiful world we dwell in together, so we can become our best versions of ourselves, ready to love this world. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus that night, there's no greater motivator to do the impossible through the improbable than love.

Let us love one another as we lift our voices high in the light of God's love, singing number...