

3/1/26
2nd Sunday in Lent
For Group Meetings from February 22nd – February 28th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: O God, our leader and guide, in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth to live as your children. Strengthen our faith in your promises, that by your Spirit we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER:

Share: How did last week's scripture (Matthew 4:1-11) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: John 3:1-17

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. How is Nicodemus described at the beginning of this text? What do we learn about his status and background?
2. Why does Nicodemus struggle with Jesus words?
3. Why does Jesus refer to the story of Moses lifting the serpent in the wilderness?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. What winds of change do you currently sense in your life?
2. What questions about faith do you carry quietly or privately?
3. When have you experienced growth in faith that you didn't plan or initiate?

Memorize this verse: And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14) Who has lifted you up recently?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 121. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

In addition to containing the world's most famous Bible verse, the story of Nicodemus offers a picture of a man who is curious about Jesus, who maybe even wants to believe, but struggles. At least, he struggles once he actually gets to talk with Jesus. Notice that he comes with a clear affirmation of Jesus' connection to God. In response, Jesus immediately jumps to a huge assertion about being born again/aneu/from above. And that's when Nicodemus curiosity turns to struggle. This is a fairly common technique in John, as the confusion or misunderstanding of Jesus' dialogue partner gives Jesus a chance to elaborate. As a result, after Nicodemus' initial confusion stemming from taking Jesus' words literally, the only other thing Nicodemus says is, "how can this be?" Which gives Jesus a good excuse to talk some more.

But what strikes me is that Nicodemus is one of the few side characters that appears at several points in John's Gospel. This story is his main appearance. But we find him again near the end of chapter 7, when he is not exactly standing up for Jesus, let alone proclaiming his faith in him, nevertheless reminds his colleagues that, according to the law, they should not judge Jesus before giving him a trial. And for offering that reminder he is rebuked. Then he makes a third appearance, this time after Jesus' crucifixion, when Nicodemus accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to collect, anoint, and bury the body of Jesus, the one just executed by the Romans. Again, perhaps not quite the same as standing up in the assembly and declaring his faith, yet nevertheless another significant step forward, as by his actions Nicodemus declares this allegiance to one who had just been executed for a capital offense.

And that's what I think makes Nicodemus such an interesting character. He is the only side character, as far as I can tell, who shows up at multiple points in John's Gospel and grows in his faith. At first, he brings questions and is confused. He later invites others to be slow in their judgment. He finally risks publicly honoring the one just executed. Faith, at least in Nicodemus' case, takes time. Indeed, his journey with Jesus continues across most of the Gospel of John and, we might assume, beyond. And that's helpful for me to hear. Maybe, for you, coming to faith was easy and fast and strong and you've rarely doubted. And all I can do is give thanks for that experience. But for others (maybe most others) faith comes more in fits and starts, two steps forward and another back. Or perhaps at times things seems clear and at others just plain confusing. Or maybe faith feels a lot more like an endless series of questions rather than easy and forthright affirmations. For those of us like that, hearing Nicodemus' story once again might be particularly meaningful. I've read somewhere (I can't remember where) that Nicodemus is the patron saint of curiosity. I love that. I think I'd also claim him as the patron saint of all those of us with an uneasy or restless faith. Those who aren't satisfied with easy answers, those who keep questioning, those who want to believe and also understand, but at least to believe even when we don't understand. Even more though, I think this story says a lot not simply about Nicodemus but also about God. God is patient. God doesn't give up. If God keeps working in and on and through Nicodemus across three years and sixteen chapters in John's Gospel, God will keep working in and on and through us. No matter how long it takes.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen