

Service for Wednesday Week of Lent 1 - 2021

Nicodemus – Leader of the Jews

Psalm 119:105-112

John 3:1-17

I am Nicodemus a Leader of the Jews. I am a pharisee, a Jewish religious leader. I love to discuss God. I love to please God. I try to reach God. I try to appease God.

Yep, that is what I do. Talk about God. Tell the people what God expects. I try solve mysteries about God. What is really fun is debating with other pharisees about God. What is lawful and right behavior. Tying your sandal on the Sabbath? Dishonoring mother and father? Another good one is, feeding people who don't work. What does God say about all these things and more. That is my job to answer these questions.

I am also in the top ten of elite scholars when it comes to God's Law or teaching. We call it the Torah. The first five books of the Bible. I have dedicated my life to God And His teachings and law. I also landed an appointment to the 71 member Sanhedrin, which is our supreme court. That is quite an honor to sit on court. So as you have pretty well figured out, I have clout, I got the degrees, I have the credentials, and...I have lots of questions.

Questions for a Galilean preacher who has been causing a stir around this place. He draws crowds to listen to Him, and as far as I know he has no credentials that even come close to what I have. We have had to deal with these self-made country preachers before. But this one is different. His name is Jesus. He hangs around crowds of RIF-RAF. He doesn't have any time for us religious elites and has on occasion called out our hypocritical teachings and behavior. He cast out demons. He heals the sick. He even forgives sins!

Still there is something about Jesus that intrigues me. Just yesterday He enter the Temple area. He didn't did look pleased. He started releasing on the animals that the priests sold the people so they could present a sacrifice to God. We had sheep and goats roaming all over the place! Birds were flying everywhere. He turned over the tables of the money changers. I must admit it warmed my heart just a bit to see His righteous anger. The place it seemed was corrupt. The money changers were crooked and the priest also got a cut of the action. When the priest asked Jesus what sign He had for doing all this, Jesus replied, "Destroy this Temple and in three day I will rise it up." What did He mean by that?

Later that night I decided I would go see Jesus. I found out where He was staying. So I sneaked my way over hoping not to be seen. My colleagues would never understand. I found His place. I knocked on the door and before I knew it I was standing face to face with Jesus. In room were men of common labor, fishermen, and even a tax collector, and some zealots whose mission was to over throw the Roman occupation. I knew these men would uncomfortable being around me as an elite scholar. Jesus invites me to sit. And after a few moments of uncomfortable silence I open the conversation. I start with what I know. Wanted to let Jesus know I have done my homework. "Rabbi, we know are a teacher from God,, for one can do the signs that you do apart from the presence of God." I felt kind of foolish to tell you the truth and Jesus could see right through the flattery. I was hoping for a little chit-chat. But there would be none of that. Jesus doesn't even recognize my status, my good efforts at law-keeping, my credentials.

Instead Jesus issues a proclamation, "No one can enter the Kingdom of God with out being born

again." I was confused and bewildered. "How can a man be born when he is old?" You got to be kidding. Put life in reverse? Rewind the tape? A start all over? These were not the questions I had coming in, but I could tell this was going in a different direction. We be born again! Oh, it would nice, to try to get right where we messed up. A second chance at life. Yeah a grey beard like me climbs back in my mother's womb.

Jesus is serious. "Unless you are born of water and spirit one cannot enter the Kingdom of God." Then a gust of wind came through the window. Then Jesus says God's power works like that wind. You don't know where it came from or where it goes. New born lives are born from heaven. You cannot wish, or you cannot earn, you cannot create it. New birth, It sounded like Jesus was saying, God handles it all. Jesus and me were on different sides of the Continental Divide. My side said, "Good deeds and efforts, sincere gestures and hard work gets me right with God.

Jesus' response is, "Your work won't do." "Your best won't do." Unless you are born again. Born again...I have pondered this and over the years of following Jesus, I have to realize that, Birth is passive. The bay had no part in it. The mother did all the work. No rewards for the baby. I finally figured it out. This being born again comes from God, the original source of our first birth.

From that night on I follow Jesus, from a distance. Even one I found myself defending Jesus when my group of pharisee want Him arrested and convicted and killed. But I said our law says you need two witnesses to convict a man in fair trial. Later the Jewish Passover they did arrest Jesus and brought Him and him before the Sanhedrin while it was still dark, which was illegal. The proceedings bothered me. They turned Jesus over to the Roman governor and He was crucified.

Then it hit me. I heard Jesus say at our first meeting. "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life." There is was Jesus lifted up on the cross. Right I saw the love of God for me and the world.

I took part in Jesus' Burial assisting Joseph of Arimathea who made His tomb available. We buried Jesus in accordance to the Jewish traditions.

Then we heard that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. Back at the Temple before I first met Jesus, He said, "destroy this Temple and I will rise it in three days." Could Jesus have been talking about Himself?

If can tell anything about my experience it is this. You can ponder and try to reach God. But it never works. It is the other way around. God reaches you through his only begotten So Jesus by coming down to you. It is through Him and His death and resurrection that He has saved you. Not based on any thing you do, for it all God's work through the Holy Spirit working through the Word that makes you born again. It comes to you through grace. Cling to Jesus in faith trusting in His promise.