

Lent 4B March 18, 2012 St. Luke John 3:14-21

Nicodemus

“But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”/ How do we know the truth and come to the light? Later in John’s gospel (8: 32), we hear, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” One of my favorite Flannery O’Connor sayings is, “ You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you... odd.. the word is odd... o-d-d”

Truth is not always as it seems /or as we make up our mind it should be. /

We are first introduced to Nicodemus in the third chapter of John’s gospel with this nightly encounter with Jesus. We are taught that Nicodemus is an upper class Israelite, a Pharisee with a Greek name, a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court. Tradition says that he comes to Jesus in the night because he, a conservative member of the establishment fears being seen with the radical Jesus. Could there be any other possibilities. Look closely and see that scripture never states why Nicodemus comes at night./ Let’s try an old Hebrew custom called Midrash, where we fill in the blanks in scripture where we don’t really know what happens./ Could possibly Nicodemus’ work be so involved in the day that he or his superior will not let him off from work during the day? Does this happen to any of you? Other possibilities.

Carey has been teaching a class on Wednesday nights on our personality type and how that affects our prayer

and spiritual life./ There are four components to our personality. Stick with me closely as I oversimplify it. **First.**/ How are we recharged? How do we get our energy? We are either an **extrovert** or an **introvert**, depending on how we are energized. An **extrovert** is energized by the outside world, being around other people. /**Introverts** are energized by being by themselves, their inner world, or a few people./ **Second.**/ How do we observe and collect data about our surroundings? Do we gather information for decision making by looking at concrete facts (a **sensing** person) or do we look more outside of the box at possibilities (an **intuitive** person)./ **Third.**/ How do we make these decisions? Do we make decisions from this information by looking at what is rational (a **thinking** person) or do we look at the value of the people or personal concerns involved (a **feeling** person)./ **Fourth.**/ How do we live in the world? Do we prefer structure, a more controlled environment, wanting issues settled (a **judging** person) or are we flexible, spontaneous, adaptable (a **perceiving** person).

Got it!/ Now let's see if we can discover Nicodemus' personality type!

Could Nicodemus be coming at night because he is an **introvert**, does not like crowds; he wants a personal, one-on-one encounter with Jesus that could only happen at night when the crowds are fast asleep in bed?/ / Earlier in this passage, Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born again, a pun that has tied our Bible Belt Christianity in knots for generations! Nicodemus

makes a response that Mary would have approved of, "How can these things be?" Nicodemus takes Jesus very literally concretely, thinking Jesus is talking about physical rebirth, so perhaps Nicodemus is a **sensing** person. Nicodemus is an intellectual, asking questions, so probably he is a **thinking** person. He also is looking for closure to questions, so probably he is a **judging** person. Don't let this throw you off, but if you have been attending the classes, this would make Nicodemus an ISTJ. I think there are some ISTJ's here in our congregation, / and perhaps now you can more easily identify with Nicodemus, a kindred spirit.

We see Nicodemus two more times in John. In his second appearance he **gently (like an introvert)** defends Jesus before the Pharisees at the Sanhedrin trial, speaking out for due process for Jesus (7:50). This would be a huge thing for an introvert to speak out when all are against him. In the last scene, Nicodemus with Joseph of Arimathea openly prepares Jesus for burial (19:39). Here again he is stepping out of his intellectual box to do a kind loving act to show how much he **values** his dead friend.

I hope now you might see Nicodemus in a different light, perhaps spending a little more time with him, getting to know him better, trying to understand why and how he makes the decisions he does, not judging him./

Carey has also been teaching a class on Sunday mornings about love and how we each show and receive love differently.

Jesus talks about love with Nicodemus in John 3:16, the

most quoted passage in the Bible, seen at football games between goal posts and painted in black below players' eyes. Jesus tells Nicodemus about God's incredible love for him which is intuitively out of the box. Even if we are intuitive persons, we can not comprehend this kind of love that God would send to us a part of himself, his son to show us how much God loves us, / putting God in this venerable human state. How can we ever know even a little about this kind of love?/// This is the answer. /// You are doing it right now.

My experience is you learn about love **in community**. This is where we consciously practice to see Christ in each other, look at each other in a different light than we might usually do.

When we are in community, learning, studying, living together where we share our stories with each other, this is where we learn this agape love and learn that what is on the surface is not always what it seems. We learn a little more of the truth and see a little more of the light and learn how to love and accept love in and from each other. We learn that that person who seems so distant is just an introvert, and that person who seems all over the place is just very intuitive, thinking of new ideas, while we see the world in concrete facts./ Many of you were at the Celtic Quiet Day last weekend, and its success can be attributed to you. It was truly a spiritual offering for St. Luke's and for our diocese, and for our community of North Little Rock. There were people from a block away and someone from Fayetteville. /I would like to share one story told by a

member of St. Luke's about her experiences that day. She gives me permission to tell the story. I won't give her full name, but she is a vestry member, a former senior warden and is retired from Children's Hospital and her husband is the chief usher./ Sherry enters the labyrinth for the first time and quickly appreciates that the labyrinth is too crowded for this to be a personal experience. She soon realizes it is an experience of living in community. We are all on the same path. It is often a crowded and busy life. We keep passing each other. Sometimes we move over and yield for strangers. Sometimes we move over and yield for friends. We are all at different places on the path. No two people are at the same place on the path. In community sometimes we are close and sometimes far apart. Sherry gets lost and experiences the fear that comes with being lost. Then miraculously she is back on the path with the help of her community. / What an experience, what a metaphor for life, what a gift of learning about God's love in community. This labyrinth is a major gift of love from St. Luke's to itself and to this community 24/7. / When I am leaving St. Luke's on Monday afternoon, as we turn the corner to enter JFK, there is a family I do not recognize/ getting out of their car/ to go over/ and walk the labyrinth. / This gift of love will keep on giving as long as we keep on offering it. Yes, here at St. Luke's, Carey and I have experienced a sense of community as we have never known before, people literally and metaphorically walking the labyrinth together, sometimes close, sometimes far

apart, sometimes lost, but walking together. That is where we truly learn about John 3:16, a love so great we cannot comprehend. We learn to go deeper and experience love for and from each other as we begin to understand how to love, the kinds and ways of love, and how to look deeper than what appears on the surface as with old Nicodemus. /

Sherry also shares one of the Celtic prayers that had been given to her at her Cursillo on a placemat at a meal many years ago. She tries through the years to find the source, cannot, /but there it is, one of the first prayers in the Celtic workbook for the Quiet Day. It is my favorite as well./

I sought my God;
My God I could not see.
I sought my soul
My soul eluded me.
I sought my sister and my brother
And I found all three.

Joanna