

May 30, 2021
Trinity Sunday
John 3: 1-17
All Saints Episcopal Church
Rev. Deborah Hughes-Habel

Seek and You Shall Find God

What I remember most in my time as an critical care nurse was that space of time in the middle of the night, just before dawn, when the bulk of my patient care was completed and I could finally sit down and savor what seemed to me to be the most precious time of day.

A time that finally felt removed from the maddening, chaotic scenes of ICU drama.

Now, the heart monitors seemed quieter while each beep resolves into a rhythmic drone along with the ever-present swooshing sound of the respirators life-giving breath.

My patients are at peace now I think. They are at rest and all will be well. I believe in my heart that this nightly experience is a gift of the most holy and sacred time of the day.

That liminal time where the spirit world and human world come closest.

Where life and death can hang in the balance.

Acceptance is in the air as I am guided to forgive all that was done or left undone.

Nicodemus, in our Gospel reading today, is finding his own night time experience.

One for which he sought after with some effort and probable risk to his reputation as a Pharisee and a member of the Sandhedrin; the “supreme court” of ancient Israel.

We can probably assume that Nicodemus had heard about Jesus and may have witnessed his teaching in the Jerusalem temple or healing acts himself as his visit on this night was during the Passover celebration in Jerusalem.

So, Nicodemus decides to travel to Bethany, approximately 2 miles east of Jerusalem, where he meets Jesus on the Mount of Olives.

The depiction of Nicodemus' visit with Jesus has been portrayed for many of us, myself included, with varying degrees of suspicion and negativity because of his night time arrival.

But I would suggest otherwise because I believe Nicodemus was a seeker, a seeker of God and, whenever and wherever he needed to go, He was compelled to find God.

It seems, what the Gospel message is telling us, is that Nicodemus is looking for a fresh perspective.

One that may liberate him from the narrow and constrictive interpretation of Jewish law and ritual purity he lives under and practices to a more open and inclusive viewpoint.

Regardless, of Nicodemus' reasoning, it seems that his life experiences and his position as a Pharisee was not feeding him any longer and so he is now seeking for what his soul longs to find; a deeper and more evolved relationship with God.

And Jesus, he decides, is the person he needs to be with.

Well steeped in Torah teaching, Nicodemus knew that at night, in the stillness, he could search for God.

But when he asks Jesus where Jesus had found the power and presence of God in his signs of healing, Jesus takes a different tack and moves the subject of his question one hundred and eighty degrees in another direction; to an entirely different plane of interpretation about where you might find the presence of God.

Jesus begins his explanation using the imagery of birth and being born from above.

But this confounds Nicodemus because his mind could only think literally of human birth!

So, Jesus goes on with another tack to explain and be more specific referring to water and spirit.

Maybe this will awaken Nicodemus' mind to what he needs to know?

But no, Nicodemus' still didn't catch on.

Poor Nicodemus, he must of been terribly confused and embarrassed with Jesus' answer.

For Nicodemus could only speak and think on a literal, finite and human level. While Jesus, was answering him on a mysterious, infinite and spiritual level.

But Jesus, stayed with him and tried to elevate Nicodemus to a new level of thinking and feeling.

This is a stretch for Nicodemus as his entire life is steeped in Jewish law and practices while living in a politically volatile 1st century time.

This is stretch for us as Christians in the 21st century too.

As our culture becomes more and more secularized and where competition for goods and services and politics exploit our sense of the truth, the presence of God made visible in signs of healing are more and more hidden in our ignorance and misunderstandings.

Even the politicalization of masks and vaccines have become a way to divide and separate us from one another.

The idea of finding God in today's world seems even more difficult.

Where do we find Jesus now?

Where do we see the Kingdom of God now?

How is the Holy Spirit working for us, with us and in us in the world now?

These are really tough questions and I feel as confounded at times as Nicodemus must of felt that night with Jesus.

So let's start with what Jesus means by the Kingdom of God.

We don't hear that language very often. We say it in our prayers and liturgy but what does Jesus mean?

According to Marcus Borg in his book "Jesus A New Vision; Spirit, Culture and the Life of Discipleship", the language of the kingdom was Jesus' way of speaking of the power and work of the Spirit in our lives.

The Spirit is what brings new life in us!

When we enter the Kingdom, we are entering into the way of the Spirit.

The Kingdom of God is where you live your life centered in God. It is a place of peace, love, compassion, healing and forgiveness.

It is a dimension of life we have to work hard to live into.

One of the difficulties we face, especially in our early lives, is to be other focused on alternative goals rather than on what Jesus is talking about. A life centered in God.

Our focus is on building our homes and growing our families while establishing our place in the world.

Our careers and relationships take center stage because we think that they will keep us secure and prosperous until the end of our lives.

We may stay faithful and continue practicing as Christians caring for our neighbors as ourselves but there will be time, like Nicodemus, where we realize that what we do in our lives isn't quite doing the job.

What we are doing isn't quite filling our spiritual cup, the cup that our soul longs to see filled.

We become seekers of what is the meaning and purpose of our lives especially as it relates to how, when and why we are here.

We go looking for God in a deeper and more meaningful way. We look high and low and even in the dark of night.

This is what Richard Rohr refers to as our second half of life journey.

A journey that recognizes that we have been to places separate from our relationship with God and now we want out of the trough, the rut, the unfulfilling experiences of life because we want to find more peace, joy and fulfillment in our lives.

We want to find out about the fullness of our being. We want to know our spiritual identity not just our human identity.

Nicodemus had made his first step.

He felt the call of the Holy Spirit to lead him to Jesus. He knew that Jesus would help him find God.

Jesus helped Nicodemus to stretch beyond his literal mind and embrace the mystery of God and see the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus reveals what it means to be a member of God's Kingdom in the here and now.

A place that is not beyond our reach or discovered after our deaths but a place we can enjoy today.

A place of freedom and truth.

A place of peace and love.

A place where we can be in the presence of God.

That is the beauty of this gospel reading today. It is our road map with a fresh perspective of what we see in our material and violent world today and it is easier to read than you may think.

With this new perspective, we can see the unknowable and incomprehensible work that the Holy Spirit does at All Saints church.

As witnessed during this time of the Covid pandemic, we are feeding and clothing more of the homeless and financially troubled families of our neighborhood than ever before.

We have expanded our relationships with the community of Woodstock to those who have never been to our church before these troubled times.

People have stepped up and into roles they had never dreamed they would be doing months before.

All Saints churches mission to celebrate God's love, to seek and to serve Christ in all persons, and to go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit seems to be bursting with vibrant energy everywhere.

We are a people of God and God's Spirit lives in us and gives the strength to do God's work in the world.

We may struggle individually on our journeys but as we witness the work of the Spirit we are lifted up, just as Jesus did for Nicodemus, with love and tenderness.

We can then feel the peace and rest in the thought that all will be well even in our own personal darkness.

Because the light of Christ will always guide us and forgive us for all that was done and left undone.

The spiritual journey has many steps and we all take them one step at a time.

Wherever we are on our journey, we must always trust in Jesus, the Word made flesh, our teacher and deliverer of truth in the Creator God's plan of love and salvation.

We must have faith that God's catalyst for it all is the Holy Spirit blowing like the wind where it chooses and even when you hear its sound, you will not know where it comes from or where it goes.

Because your Creator God, who loves you, has initiated from the very beginning a relationship of interconnectedness that creates, liberates and heals.

A connectness that we celebrate today as the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

