

March 11, 2018 2nd Sunday in Lent
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Numbers 21:4-9, Ephesians 2:1-10
John 3:14-21

(Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening, by Cynthia Bourgeault, Cowley Publications, pg. 69-70.)

Grace and peace, through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's Nicodemus I've been thinking about this week.

Good ol' Nicodemus.

He was a religious leader so caught up in earnest wondering that he came to Jesus at night full of heady questions, questions he supposed—probably correctly—could get him into trouble.

How does this faith-thing work? he wondered.

How can we be born of the Spirit? How can these things be?

Why Nicodemus? you may be asking.

Why are you thinking about Nicodemus when he doesn't even show up in our scriptures this morning?

Well, because this oft-quoted, uber-popular passage, this Gospel-in-a-nutshell, some say:

For God so loved the world..., is really just the tail-end of the story about faithful, curious Nicodemus.

Nicodemus, full of questions, searching, yearning.

Nicodemus, who shows up in the night and then disappears from the scene until the very end, when Jesus has died.

It's Nicodemus, you know, who carefully takes Jesus' broken, bloody body, after the cross, lugging in hundreds of pounds of myrrh and aloe for the burial rite.

It's Nicodemus, who must have known well that story we heard of the bronze serpent, held up on a pole, that in their sin the Israelites looked at and lived.

It's Nicodemus, who hears close-up these promises of Jesus:

It's okay,

I've got it,

you are forgiven,

you are healed,

you have life, the world has life,

now love each other,

care for each other.

Nicodemus, he's a good mystic, really, leaning into the holy mystery, resting there, dwelling in the mercy.

Today we use again *Lectio Divina* to draw us into this holy mystery and our Lenten practice.

We did this two weeks ago and a number of you came to be afterward taken by it, maybe a little surprised, moved by its sense of space and silence.

That said, it's newer to many of us, and it may feel odd, or like we're not doing it right, that's okay.

Lectio Divina means simply Holy Reading or Divine Reading.

Cynthia Bourgeault, a modern mystic and practitioner writes of the "collective amnesia that fell over Christianity with regard to its own contemplative heritage".

She writes, our minds are like ladders, we climb ladders trying to get somewhere.

Oh, Nicodemus, you know this temptation!

In actuality, she says, this life of faith, this practice of Jesus' way, is more truly a circle, fluid in process, moving, sometimes drawing us in deeply, beautifully, organically.

Today as we practice *Lectio*, we'll use as our focus a portion of our Ephesian's reading.

We'll move through four stations, like points on a compass, with silence between.

We'll hear a portion of the passage and as you hear it, listen for a word or a phrase that touches you.

Then we'll hear it again; hold onto that word or phrase, memorize it, repeat it, chew on it.

Listen to what God may be saying to you through that word or phrase, take what God wants to give you.

Then we'll hear it yet again, and this time let it be prayer, your heart speaking to our loving God, moving from your head to engage your heart.

Finally we'll rest, rest in God's presence.

These stations and the passage are in the bulletin.

Use them as you need to, but mostly just let your heart settle into this time of prayer.

We begin by getting comfortable, become silent inside and outside. Take a deep breath, exhale.

Listen this first time for a word or a phrase that touches you:

READ _____

But God, who is rich in mercy,
out of the great love with which God loved us
even when we were dead through our trespasses,
Made us alive together with Christ....
For by grace you have been saved through faith,
And this is not your own doing;
It is the gift of God—not the results of works,

So that no one may boast.

SILENCE

Hold onto that word or phrase, repeat it, memorize it, chew on it, listen for what God may be saying to you through it:

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Listen again and let this be prayer, your heart speaking with our God who loves you, deeply loves you:

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Finally, rest, rest in God's presence.

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Thank you, each one of you, for daring to dwell with God and for trying something new and holy.

Remember those words of promise that Jesus offered Nicodemus, and all of us:

It's okay,
I've got it,
you are forgiven,
you are healed,
you have life, the world has life,

now love each other,
care for each other.

Beloved in Christ, the God who saw the Israelites through the wilderness years,

The God who claimed Nicodemus in his questions and his love,

The God who reaches out from the cross, dying that we may have life,

is the same God who in Christ Jesus heals and forgives and loves this world, and you and me.

THIS God, our God, + bless you and keep you now and always. Amen.

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