

The story of Jesus meeting Nicodemus is a familiar text, packed with thought provoking questions about Nicodemus's relationship with Jesus and our own relationship to Jesus. As we reflect on the meaning of the text for us this Lent, it is important to consider the historical context and the meaning of John's world view. John was likely writing to a of community Jews and Gentiles who were followers of Jesus at the end of the first century.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee; he is educated, a leader of Jews and has seen the "signs" that Jesus has performed. He knows that these healing are from God. Significantly for the Gospel of John, these signs are not miracles, rather they are events that point toward the presence of God. Nicodemus, as a faithful leader, seeks out Jesus at night. John wants us to pause here and wonder. Is it night in contrast to the "Light" of the world, night, because this a meeting he doesn't want to be public, or night because Nicodemus does not fully understand what it means to encounter Jesus. Or could it be all these possibilities?

Jesus meets Nicodemus and suggests to him that he cannot know the meaning of these signs of healing without being born from "above". To see from God's worldview means to enter a new relationship, a new perspective that grows out of an encounter with Jesus. Heaven and earth are not spatial, rather God's worldview and earth--with its all the brokenness of relationship. Resting in the brokenness, it is not possible to fully see God's perspective. To be born from above means something happens that brings about a new life.

Curious for us and for Nicodemus, is that Jesus says, "Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:7-8) Somehow, like a cooling breeze that has just come up on the roof top meeting place, we, and Nicodemus are not in charge of that moment and encounter with the Spirit. Here it is not the plunge into the River Jordan in baptism, but the awareness of the Wind—Breath of God—blowing across our faces in the night air. We can "know" the signs, and still, it is God who brings us into something else, a new perspective, a healing, a new life. We are participants and God leads us into a New Life. And like wind, even in the world of the meteorologist, it is a mystery.

A word about the "pole," also "sign" from Genesis. The Israelites were dying from snake bites. Moses lifts a pole, a sign, for the people to look at; if they keep their eyes on the sign, they are healed and do not die. In John, this points to the cross.

We may wonder about Nicodemus who seems unsatisfied, or still filled with questions, but John does not forget him in the Gospel narrative. He appears later to defend Jesus against the Sanhedrin and stands with Joseph of Arimathea and lifts Jesus down, off the cross, when he dies. Nicodemus follows Jesus and stays with him, even when he dies.

God comes into the world and in our relationship with Jesus, we enter into God's unconditional Love of the world.

*Susan+*

