

Sermon breadcrumbs: March 5, 2023

[Lectionary Readings](#)

Focus: Nicodemus this week, unnamed Samaritan next week

During Lent we get a heavy rotation from the Gospel of John. This week (the Second Sunday of Lent) is about Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. Next week will be about the unnamed Samaritan woman. On the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we hear about the man born blind. Finally, the fifth week is about the raising of Lazarus. All these stories have an element of confusion and resetting: the person in question does not understand what Jesus is saying. But they work through the confusion to find insight. Sometimes this process is quick like with the Samaritan woman. Sometimes it is very drawn out like Nicodemus.

Nicodemus I want to compare these last two. Maybe you are like Nicodemus, a well-respected Jewish leader. You're smart and you've figured out the game of life, but you are hard to surprise. Maybe, take a cue from young kids because they are surprised all the time. This is true not just because they are inexperienced, but also because they are *looking* for surprises. That's a discipline we could all use.

Lately, I have been going on "weird walks." I walk (normally) until I see something out of the ordinary. Once I see the thing, I rejoice (quietly). I keep walking, but I change directions. I don't make a big show of this because I don't want you to think something is wrong with me in downtown Danville. It is silly, but I find it changes my mood, my perspective, and lightens my day.

Samaritan Woman Or maybe you are like the unnamed Samaritan woman. This one might be harder. If you have been beaten down, told you were unworthy AND you internalized it, you will need grace to interrupt your day. When I was about 12 years old, I started helping my father rehab some of his rental properties. I hated it. For example, a belt sander took off my left ring fingernail that even now grows funny. But I did look forward to my conversation with the six-pack-a-day, chain-smoking Myrtle. She lived on a fixed, very low income, social security check. She sounded like what you would imagine Janice Joplin would sound like at 80.

I loved her. I loved hearing her stories about growing up and her overcoming being treated like garbage. It was a nice break from the grubby sanding work. I told her how much I looked forward to seeing her and her dog Snowball. BTW, I think Snowball was drunk too, because he would have at least one from the six pack of her beer. When I told her how much I liked her and her stories, she was shocked. No one, not even my father, had ever treated her nicely. She was lighter and so was I after I left. No lights from heaven, just connection. I still hold that dear 40 years later.

Page 2 is Bible nerd notes

Signs and wonders Remember that John loves to talk about signs.

7 signs of God’s power:

1. Water into wine at Cana -- John 2:1-11
2. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum -- John 4:46-54
3. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda -- John 5:1-15
4. Feeding the 5000 -- John 6:5-14
5. Jesus walking on water -- John 6:16-24
6. Healing the man born blind -- John 9:1-7
7. The raising of Lazarus -- John 11:1-45

And today, Nicodemus and next, the Samaritan woman are between wine (sign 1) and the healing of the official’s son (sign 2). John really likes poetry and structure, The bridge between sign 1 and 2 follows an A B C D C ’B’ A’ pattern. Take a look:

A *Sign 1* Water to wine in Cana – 2:1-12.

B The leaders of Jerusalem in conflict with Jesus – 2:13-22 (insider conflict)

C Nicodemus – 2:23-3:21 (insider confusion)

D Jesus baptizes more than John – 3:22-4:3 (outsiders rejoice)

C1 Samaritan woman – 4:4-27 (outsider clarity)

B1 Many in Sychar believe – 4:28-45. (outsider in solidarity)

A1 *Sign 2* Healing of an official’s son – 4:46-54.

These stories move from the faithlessness of the leaders to the faithfulness of outsiders. To drive this point home with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman:

| Nicodemus | Samaritan Woman |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Well known | unknown |
| Thinks he owns the truth | She believes in heresies |
| Powerful official | No role/ no power |
| revered | disdained |
| Leaves confused (until the end of John) | Finds understanding quickly |
| Seeks out Jesus at night | Encounters Jesus during the day |

I think the deeply personal encounter stories are a great way to understand your own confusion and ambiguity of faith. Know there is still room to figure it out. Maybe focus on where you feel left out? If you are certain that you are important and powerful or even faithful, there is not much wiggle room. **Todd**