

Sneaky, scared, apprehensive, unsure. All these words apply to the man Nicodemus as he approached Jesus late one night under the cover of darkness. Not many crimes happen in broad daylight. Thieves like the cover of darkness so they cannot be seen. The night holds secrets. Nighttime is when people whisper things they don't want to be heard by certain people.

Nicodemus chose the night to come to see Jesus and ask him questions. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and by this time, the Pharisees regarded Jesus as their enemy. It didn't matter to them what Jesus said. They wouldn't give Jesus the benefit of the doubt. They were now doing everything in their power to undermine him, to discredit him, to murder him. But there was at least one Pharisee that we know of, named Nicodemus, who placed value on what Jesus was doing and wanted to know more.

So, he came to Jesus to debate with him and try to learn more about Jesus' point of view, to see if he was indeed teaching the truth. It sounded to Nicodemus like Jesus might be the real thing. But Nicodemus would not approach Jesus in the afternoon when he stood preaching in front of everyone. If the other Pharisees knew that Nicodemus was talking to Jesus, they would have at least ostracized him and maybe even sentenced him to death as well. It was too risky. Yet Nicodemus was drawn to our Lord, so he settled on coming to Jesus at night, privately, when no one else would see or hear.

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus, in his typical fashion, says something that seems unrelated to what was said to him. Jesus says, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

Already, at the beginning of the conversation, Nicodemus is lost. I wish John had recorded in his gospel what Nicodemus must have been thinking, which was something like, “Whoa, what are you talking about?” Instead, we read the answer Nicodemus gave which shows his utter confusion: “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Is Jesus deliberately trying to confuse poor Nicodemus? After all, shouldn’t this one, good Pharisee get a word of praise or encouragement from Jesus? Jesus is not deliberately trying to confuse Nicodemus; he is trying to show him the truth.

Sometimes when you are living in lies and falsehood, it is hard to comprehend the truth. If you are walking in a dark room, and suddenly someone shoots the camera flash in your face, it doesn’t help you see, it makes things worse as large bright spots appear before your eyes. Maybe that’s what it was like talking to Jesus, the most truthful man who ever lived.

A criminal who has justified his life of crime for years and years will have trouble coming to grips with the truth about his own behavior. Or consider therapy. Therapy in our country is a growth industry as we try to sort out our moods and behaviors to get better. We need therapy because for years we have been living with a distorted picture of ourselves. It takes time to change our outlook.

Jesus didn’t give Nicodemus any time, he just gave him the whole truth all at once. That’s all Jesus had time to do. After all, he was going to the cross very soon. But you have to hand it to Nicodemus. He doesn’t give up. He does what we do. He keeps digging himself deeper and deeper. And with each shovelful, Jesus gives him more truth.

When the electricity goes out in your home at night, it is suddenly very dark. You grab the flashlight and find the drawer where you keep the candles. You take a bunch out, strike a match, and light a candle. It gives a dim glow in the room. You need more, so you keep lighting candles and putting them in holders until the whole room has enough light so you can see everything. So, Jesus lights some candles.

Jesus continues: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 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.”

Christianity is a whole new start. Meeting Jesus is like having the building inspector come and finding that all the sills around the foundation of your house are rotten. The basement is crumbling beyond repair. The house will collapse unless you act immediately, and nothing less than a whole new foundation will do. You cannot do this yourself. You must let someone else do it for you. Jesus comes and gives our lives a whole new foundation. Himself. And that foundation is secure and that foundation is eternal. It is like being born again.

When my kids were born and I saw them and held them for the first time, my legs were weak. I felt like I was floating! It was astounding. Here in my arms was a human being with nothing but potential. Here was a human being with nothing but a future. The babies did not have to make up for anything they had done. My children didn’t have any mistakes to fix. They were just there. This was a point in time with no past at all, just a wide-open future.

That’s what Jesus gives you. You may not believe it, but when you walk out of here, the slate is clean. You are embarking on a whole new life, with just a future. That is a gift of God. We all need the foundation fixed and we can’t do it.

Like you cannot eliminate distasteful things in your past, only Jesus can. Jesus told Nicodemus, “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.”

The word for Spirit in Greek is pneuma. It is also the word for wind. There is a word play here. We cannot produce the wind. We can harness it in a sail. We can generate electricity with a windmill turning a turbine. But we cannot cause it. The weather forecasters on the nightly news just tell us what is going to be.

God comes to you like that. It is under God’s control. Not our own. You cannot earn your own new birth. It is free and it is a gift. What’s more, it is good. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

For God so loved...We may not understand everything Jesus said. But it all leads to the same place. It all leads to love. Our world can be dark indeed. Read the papers. Think of the darkness in Ukraine and Palestine, and wherever war rages. Think of the HIV crisis in Africa, and other places where diseases like malaria kill children. Think of poverty which keeps so many people from fully living. There is darkness. But a light is shining that the worst darkness cannot extinguish. The light is the love of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save the world. He is saving it now.

“The New Birth” John 3:1-15 Holy Trinity 2025

Churches work with him when they tell the good news and when they do good works. Obeying Christ and doing good is like switching on a lamp with a new one hundred watt bulb. It brightens things. It helps us to see. The world needs people who will do what Jesus says. The church needs people who lose themselves in service to Christ. It is time for us to let go. It is time for us to stop worrying about our age, what is wrong, what might happen, and put ourselves in the hands of the Lord. It is time for us to be born again to love and service and eternal life.

We have been born again to partnership with Jesus. He tells us we are no longer servants, but heirs of the king. That makes us royalty. That makes us responsible. That makes us loved. With that, let's all go be lights in the darkness of this world, lighting the way to Jesus, who is truly the way, the truth, and the light. Amen!