

February 5, 2017

Ministry of Imagination

READ: John 3:1-2 (Common English Bible)

“There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. He came to Jesus at night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him.’”

MEDITATE:

Nicodemus calls the church to a ministry of imagination. A Pharisee, Nicodemus departs from the narrow, walled-in sectarian views of his colleagues and comes to Jesus in sympathetic inquiry. Perhaps Nicodemus is weary of the wooden, cramping and belittling understanding of the Bible that limits fellowship with others of another point of view. Perhaps Nicodemus fears that barriers of thought and divisions in the fellowship of faith can produce nothing higher than spiritual dwarfs. Perhaps Nicodemus simply wishes for a more expansive and imaginative faith and believes that Jesus can offer the necessary nutriment. For whatever reason, Nicodemus comes to Jesus.

A large faith, a full-grown faith must borrow from others. The genius of maturity is the recognition that a wider vision of this life demands the stimulus of thought found in another’s wealth. No one discovers adequate nourishment for their own development within the poverty of self-centeredness and narrow-mindedness. If we are to exercise ourselves in the wider vision of imagination – as does Nicodemus – we must listen sympathetically to understandings not our own. Otherwise we exist only in an echo chamber, our thought never growing, never expanding. It is well documented that even Shakespeare fetched his water of inspiration from the wells of other great thinkers and writers.

J. H. Jowett reflects that one’s life, thinking and theology will remain comparatively dormant unless it is breathed upon by the bracing influence of fellowship of thought that is beyond our own.¹ Communion with viewpoints on every side, viewpoints to both the left and right of our own grasp of the Bible and the world of thought, lifts our powers for imagination. It is in a grand and inquisitive imagination that our faith discovers strength and grand proportions. It is where we acknowledge that Jesus is more than anyone can ever fully grasp.

It would be well if persons of faith were to exercise the same imaginative curiosity of Nicodemus. A sincere recognition of another’s position, appreciation for another’s point of view and discovery of another’s purpose and aim in faith strengthens the fellowship of church. Rather than “leaving the table” when disagreements of faith arise, perhaps it would be a richer and more spacious church if we recall the largest common denominator that has always held the people of faith together, the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

¹J.H. Hewett, *Thirsting for the Springs: Twenty-Six Weeknight Meditations* (London: H.R. Allension, Limited, 1907), 193.

