

SESSION 3 – Gregg Knepp calls this text *Under the Cover of DARKNESS* – (Nicodemus visits Jesus) John 3:1-18

- Nicodemus is identified as both a leader of the Jews and a Pharisee
- Compliments Jesus – Rabbi we know you are teacher come from God
- Nicodemus unable to understand metaphorical language of Jesus and instead interprets literally
- Nicodemus comes at night (Remember dualistic thinking and the themes of Light and Darkness)
- Despite being an educated religious professional Nicodemus is also blind to spiritual truth of Jesus
- Nicodemus is captive to his social standing as a Pharisee
- Nicodemus is unable to see Jesus as anything more than a teacher of the Law
- Nicodemus thinks he understands Jesus but shows that he does not because he cannot get out of his worldview and does not get something that does not fit that view
- However, Nicodemus does know something that is true – (that is if he is being genuine - we do not know the tone of the text) (whenever we codify a story and put it in writing we can miss some things) What does Nicodemus know? – that - **Jesus is from God!!!**
- Jesus invites Nicodemus to see the world through an alternative lens but he fails to do so
- Sometimes it is the calling of the church to reveal a truth that is being or has been suppressed by the culture because it does not want it out in the light and have to see it or admit it – Of course we argue over what those truths may be - Truth can be subjective depending on one’s social location and perspective!!
- Articulating God’s vision of truth was one of Jesus’ tasks and the Old Testament Prophets before him
- Prophets served as messengers to the religious, political, and social leaders who failed to take care of the most vulnerable and marginalized people of society
- What is the lens through which the teachings of Jesus are viewed by the majority of middle-class Americans? As opposed to the “truth” from the perspective of the landless farm workers in Central America experience?
- SOMETIMES THE SEARCH FOR KNOWLEDGE AND ENLIGHTENMENT IN THE DARKNESS REQUIRES LOOKING AT THE WORLD IN A WHOLE NEW WAY!!

Nicodemus could not do this or was unprepared to do it. Are we prepared or willing to do it? Can this be the essence of being born again? “Anothen” is the Greek word, and literally means - Being born from “above” (born again, would not be the first wooden translation) I have always viewed this text Christologically - as Jesus was obviously talking about himself here – As opposed to the theology that you need to have a baptism of the Holy Spirit or a Spiritual experience from above before you are truly a Christian – The only person who can be born from above is Jesus and he is talking about himself and it is through him that any person can confess Jesus as the Christ

-David Rensberger offers another view of this story in his Johannine Faith and Liberating Community. He treats it as a story pitting the crypto Christians who could not go as far as openly confessing Jesus as the Messiah and instead chose their security over the alienation that open confession would bring. It would mean socially *downward movement/expulsion from the synagogue* - Nicodemus was the archetypal representative of the conflict between this community of religious leaders etc. and Jesus

-Is it possible that Nicodemus actually believes Jesus to be the Messiah but is not willing to commit himself to the hardships/marginalization of that confession in the early church? It certainly makes John 3:16-17 make more sense!

-Greg Knepp – asks – Could Nicodemus be an example of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s immortal words, “...in the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

It is interesting that the writer of John’s Gospel has this story in chapter 3 happen at night and the woman at the well in the next chapter occur during the noontime of the day. John’s gospel is fond of using the light/darkness themes. When I was in Guatemala, and some other folks I know that were in El Salvador during the civil war there - We were told that you did not go out at night because that is when kidnappings and military intimidation happened at its most because it was under the cover of darkness! So, what is the meaning of Nicodemus approaching Jesus at night?

Reflection for Personal Spiritual Growth

“No small part of my religious conversion has been coming to know that faith is best thought of as a verb, not a “thing” that you either have or you don’t...Faith is constant, always there, but surging and ebbing, sometimes strongly evident and at other times barely discernible on my spiritual landscape.” Kathleen Norris “Amazing Grace, A Vocabulary of Faith

How would you define “faith?” What do you think of Kathleen Norris’ description of faith?

Are there times when faith can get in the way of understanding? Such as - Is our trust misplaced or so in need of adjustment we cannot see differently just like Nicodemus?

Identify a time in your life when something you thought you knew became challenged by an alternate reality.

In what significant way did you grow during those times of enlightenment and discovery?

Consider – If Nicodemus had truly desired to become a follower of Jesus, he would have to give up his privileged social status and position as a Pharisee. For many Christians around the world, to confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior puts their lives and livelihood at risk. How much would YOU be willing to risk for your faith. (Atheists in America put their livelihood at risk for openly stating their non-belief – This is a strange Juxtaposition if you think about it

Some Challenging Questions to Ponder from Gregg Knepp

Leonardo Boff – argues that Christians should analyze the world from the “periphery” of the established social order.

In what ways does your congregation or denomination provide opportunities for people to reflect upon the structural nature of sin and work to address systemic injustice?

In what ways does your congregation stand with people who are oppressed and marginalized in society?

In what ways does your congregation provide opportunities for its members to become spiritually enlightened through encounters with sisters and brothers who are different from the dominant culture?

How does your congregational culture and worship predominantly reflect the dominant culture in your community? In what ways does your congregation’s culture and worship recognize alternate worldviews and visions, particularly as it relates to those who are most marginalized in our society?

How is your congregation in your local neighborhood? Are any congregational leaders involved in neighborhood associations, local business associations, community meetings, etc.?

Is there pressure in your congregation avoid discussing topics which may lead to conflict or to remain silent in the face of issues of injustice? If so, what are those sensitive topics?