

## WELCOME 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 – 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost '24 B

### *Living Water Fellowship @ 11*

John 7:40-52 & 19:38-42

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again today! **Bible Study Qs/GPs** are there to equip you so God can lead you deeper into His word/work in your life, & farther out into his world to you can share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.

**As we move into this week...Love** at first sight... **A-ha!** moments when the pieces fall into place. **Eureka!** flashes of insight when we see the answer through the previous fog of confusion. As much as we like to think this is how life works; we know better. Wisdom comes w/ experience. Understanding grows w/ familiarity. Perception builds w/ practice. And...FAITH...most often FAITH takes time before it takes **hold**.

Exhibit **A**...Nicodemus. He first appears in the gospels under cover of darkness curious & questioning. He continues to seek what is true at some risk & at the end helps in the temporary burial of Jesus...He's *ALL IN* when others have fled.

*"Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up, 'Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?' he **asked.**"*

It takes courage to be curious. It takes courage to seek the truth. It takes courage to be transformed by the truth when you experience it. It takes courage to ask hard questions & venture on a journey of discovery when others have closed their minds. But living courageously is at the heart of Nicodemus' story & *HIS STORY* challenges & emboldens us to live courageously when it matters most.

We don't have to defend Jesus, just listen to him & courageously trust him so that we & those around us can be transformed by him.

We'll experience & share that today...Let's pray...

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Great & glorious God...Thank you for the hope you offer. Thank you for the promises you have made & are certain to keep. Thank you that a new & transformed world is coming, because Jesus, has been raised as the first fruits of those who died. Thank you that because he lives, His people will be raised... Because He was changed, His people & this world will be changed...redeemed renewed & restored. Open our eyes & our hearts to see all around us those who falter for lack of assurance...who stumble for want of a secure hand...& who will die apart from you unless we speak of your salvation. Thank you for the life you give...By your Spirit offer it through our words & deeds...in Jesus' Name...Amen.*

*Let's sing and then hear God's Word*

**Faith chat as in Service Order**

## 5 Pentecost '24 B – LIVING COURAGEOUSLY: NICODEMUS

**If** there was one question you could ask Jesus right now...what would it be? Would you want a private chat or would being seen w/ him in public be ok? That's how we meet Nicodemus...questions bubbling up inside him that even he can't fully articulate, but he knows can't be asked in a public forum...his position forbids it. As a leader among the Pharisees he becomes familiar w/ Jesus, his teaching, miracles & perhaps claims of Sonship...But what it all means: **After** *dark one evening, Nicodemus came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."* That's not really a question, but once Jesus speaks, the questions flow like water from an open tap...**"What** do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. **"How** can an old man go back into his mother's womb & be born again?" **"How** are these things possible?"

Now we don't know what happens to Nicodemus after that night's encounter. We don't know what goes on in Nicodemus' heart when Jesus says: **"I** tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God." We don't know how he understands the truth that...**"...no** one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water & the Spirit." We don't really know how he absorbs the truth from Jesus that: **"This** is how much God loved the world: He gave his one & only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

It's likely he has even more questions churning inside because when we next see him in the gospel, **HE'S** the one who wants more time to listen to Jesus, more time to ask more questions, more time because it seems he knows... Wisdom comes w/ experience. Understanding grows w/ familiarity. Perception builds w/ practice. **Then** Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. *"Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?"* he asked. And...FAITH...most often FAITH takes time before it takes **hold**. Nicodemus doesn't yet believe...but let's explore that for a minute...

In the course of John's gospel, we encounter Nic 3X. 1<sup>st</sup> when no one else is around. He clearly doesn't fully understand who Jesus is or what Jesus offers. All he knows is there's a ring of truth in Jesus, & the miracles are enough to have earned Nic's ear. What he sees is not a heretic to his Jewish faith, but a clear witness to its goal...life in nearness to God like never b/4 & nowhere else. Here...the 2<sup>nd</sup> encounter b/4 Nic & Jesus...he stands on the firm ground of the Law which demands a fair trial b/4 you convict someone. It takes courage to be curious. It takes courage to seek the truth. It takes courage to be transformed by the truth when you experience it. It takes courage to ask hard questions & venture on a journey of discovery when others have closed their minds.

I'm awed by Nic here. Look at what he **DOESN'T** do...He doesn't fall into the apologetics trap...of thinking he has to defend Jesus. He doesn't try to explain away the seeming conflict b/4 Jesus & the Pharisees' understanding of the Law/prophets. Nic never tries to convince or convert, defend or persuade; he just says, "Let him speak for himself. Just give him a fair hearing. Just hear him out." **AND** he says that having much to lose. He's a leader among the Pharisees. He risks prestige, status, position, & students in standing **FOR** justice more than standing **AGAINST** Jesus. The verdict has already been rendered by the others, **"Is** there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him? This foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law. God's curse is on them!" But peer pressure, the threat of being ostracized, the risk of public condemnation seem to be no threat at all to Nic...single voice against the crowd

We all know the balancing act we play among friends, family, work colleagues, fellow students, neighbours...who aren't Xns...who maybe even are antagonistic to faith. We know those folks. We love them. We know the desire to maintain those relationships, knowing full well the day will come when we will either keep those relationships for eternity or lose them forever. So do we endanger the joy of today & the next few years or reach for joy that never dies? Nicodemus chooses the latter. Nicodemus chooses to reach for a joy unsurpassed, a wisdom exceeding that of Scribe/Pharisee, & a hope that is untarnished by the harsh words of its opponents. FAITH takes time before it takes hold. Nic is not yet convinced...but he's still listening, & he wants to hear more... **AND** he's pretty sure if the others would just listen maybe they'd start seeing what he sees...

Do you see why I tell you to never quit praying for or sharing your faith, your hope, your devotion, your assurance w/ other people? Do you see why we never shy away from telling the truth? FAITH takes time before it takes hold. We don't know when that prayer for a grandchild's heart will be answered or a niece will say "I honestly don't know...what do you think?" Our world indulges in fantasy & wishful thinking on a scale beyond imagining...people will believe & bet their lives on utter madness. I sent this to the guys on my text list the other day: *"Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies & high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking & from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ."* **- Col 2:8** "High-sounding nonsense." How much high-sounding nonsense in 2024 is believed unquestioningly just like the Jewish leaders "knew" Jesus was nuts & all who believed him were cursed by God? Every survey among not-yet-Xns indicates there are many potential Nicodemuses out there...prepared to listen...give Jesus a hearing...**if** someone they trust will speak... **After** Jesus had died, Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus'

body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came & took the body away. <sup>39</sup> With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh & aloes. There is still a lot we don't know. Certainly there's much Nic & Joseph of Arimathea don't know...*BUT* it seems in witnessing Jesus' suffering & death, Nic sees enough to spur him into action. Taking possession of a criminal's body would have been notable. For them to speak to Pilate, sign the forms, pay the fees...gov'ts always have forms & fees... remove Christ's body from the cross & transport it to a tomb...wash, wrap, & apply the overwhelming amount of spices Nic brought to honour & serve Jesus...This is a man who is now *ALL IN*. Nicodemus is no longer hiding in the shadows, he & Joseph are physical visible signs of faith active in love. FAITH takes time before it takes **hold**.

Do you see why I tell you to never quit praying for or sharing your faith, your hope, your devotion, your assurance w/ other people? Do you see why we never shy away from telling the truth? What have we said...It takes courage to be curious. It takes courage to seek the truth. It takes courage to be transformed by the truth when you experience it. It takes courage to ask hard questions & venture on a journey of discovery when others have closed their minds. It takes courage to be single voice against a crowd. Living courageously is @ the heart of Nicodemus' story & *HIS STORY* challenges us & emboldens us to live courageously when it matters most. **NB:**

Last week we said even if you can't fix you can be faithful...can't cure you can be compassionate. You may never convince or convert...but you can be courageous.

We don't have to defend Jesus, just listen to him & courageously trust him so that we & those around us can be transformed by him.

#### **TAKE IT HOME-**

What will you do this week to listen more closely to Jesus  
so someone else can hear him in you?

Let's pray w/ that in mind... *Gracious Father, you have claimed us as your own & set us to work in your world for the sake of Christ & for the expanding embrace of your Kingdom. By your Spirit use all our efforts & energies so that your church is strengthened, your mission furthered, & your Name praised. Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.*