

“My name is Nicodemus” a sermon based on John 3:1-17 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 12 March 2017.

My name is Nicodemus. You’ve read about me in the Bible. Three times. But we’ll come to that.

A little about me ...

If there were two words about me - cautious and curious.

Cautious –

I am a leader in the Jewish community. And as a leader I am conscious of my responsibilities. I have a reputation to keep and a dignity to maintain. People look to me for advice. They know me to be level-headed and sensible and I don’t want to compromise my reputation.

I have a reputation for not taking risks. If risk is involved, I act behind the scenes, away from public gaze, until I am sure.

So this Jesus, I come to him at night, to assess, to check out, to inquire.

Cautious, yes, but also curious.

I am especially intrigued by the reports of miracles. In my faith, miracles are a sign of God being with someone.

If he performs miracles, then God is with him.

But there is the other stuff, the stuff with women, with Samaritans, with tax collectors, with those poor fishers.

I can’t really be seen with him. What kind of person is he?

There are so many crooks and charlatans and fools.

People are credulous; some fanatical.

I am not known for enthusiasm.

I weigh evidence, exercise logic, keep sane.

I make plausible and reasoned decisions.

And I am religious, traditionally religious, acceptably religious,
mainstream religious.

I am a conscientious Pharisee, a "member of the ruling Jewish council," "a
teacher of Israel."

Some call me a religious professional.

You can see there are limits on what I can do, because there are these
non-negotiables, these certainties.

To imagine something entirely different – how do we do that?

To commit, to take risks, to question and doubt and wonder– how do we
do that?

Can you see why I find Jesus such a challenge?

He is asking me to take a risk, to move from being an antagonist, from
being a ruler to being a member of the persecuted minority.

He seems to know how much of a step it is for me: "You must be born
again,".

He understands how hard it is for me to imagine a different way of
being.

To give up my own will.

To lose control, give up power.

To trust him for the journey, not knowing the destination.

To give up being sure of myself.

To disrupt the status quo, when so many look to me.

To be open to the uncontrollable wind of God.

To embrace God, the ancient new.

But I belong in this world, my position is clear, my role is evident and I am respected.

How can I be born from above?

How can I be born again?

How can I be born of God and not just my mother?

How can I receive faith, not achieve faith?

The great thing is he accepts my questions.

He speaks of love, not condemnation.

Too many of my friends dismiss him or fit him into their world, but he doesn't fit.

He takes all my questions, all my wonderings, all my ambiguous feelings, this is what I give.

And even in my questions I sense him turning me, orienting me.

He says to me

The life of God is not far away from you. It is near to you, right next to you, speaking to you now. The passionate love that flows in the divine life, this love has spilled out into the world so much.

God so loved the world that God has given God's only Son not to condemn the world but to save it ... for us to know fullness of life.

I am told people wrote about me, because of my questions, and because of what happened later.

Later I am willing to support Jesus in a verbal contest against other religious authorities.

It is true I don't throw my full weight behind him.

Cautious remember –but in my caution, I offer what I have..

Then after Jesus dies, I join Joseph of Arimathea in burying the body of Jesus.

Well I like decency. I like order. I offer that.

I don't know whether it is enough, but I offer it.

My caution and my curiosity, I offer it.

And I am grateful he held before me, the invitation, to be born from above, of the Spirit, into a new world of seeing and living and acting.

And I am grateful he fostered this alternative community, to point to this new world, to keep issuing the invitation, to keep helping people walk through the door.

Open windows, fresh breezes, a new creation, the life of Jesus, the way of God, the gift of the Spirit.

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