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There are times in my spiritual journey that I fall into the trap that makes me think I am growing when actually I am staying the same. My self growth turns into another kind consumerism. I read books and articles, check out the news, meditate, listen to podcasts, read my Bible, and save memes about peace, or mindfulness. I fill my mind with truth but after a while it is meaningless, until I do something about it.

I think this is how Nicodemus may have felt before he ventured out one night to meet Jesus. Jesus has created quite a stir in Jewish community. Nicodemus needs to talk to Jesus. Perhaps he doesn't want to be seen. Maybe he needs a safe space to ask the questions without falling under the scrutiny of his peers.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee, deeply embedded in religious leadership. He is convinced by Jesus' actions that Jesus is "a teacher who has come from God." He implies that there are others that he knows who have the same belief.

Jesus responds that this isn't enough. You must be "born anew" to see God's kingdom.

In this meeting, Jesus teaches Nicodemus the essential doctrine of spiritual rebirth ("born of water and the Spirit"). Nicodemus initially struggles to understand this concept. How can we be born again in human form? And Jesus replies, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

This begins with faith. It's not a one and done conversion experience, like some people bear witness to. It is a continuing journey of following Jesus and being transformed by the Holy Spirit.

And as if to put a point on it, Jesus says, "For God so loved the world...? Eternal Life is not just an endless duration of time but a superior quality of life, that comes from knowing God.

Faith by definition, “is the confident assurance and trust in things hoped for and not yet seen.” My siblings and I, all four of us, married within a span of 2 years. Our uncle Fred, a pastor, and possibly in response to our engagement jitters said, “ultimately marriage is leap of faith, taking that step into the unknown”. Faith is a response to the extraordinary love two people have for each other.

In the same way God’s love for us gently nudges us into faith, because God loved the world. It is a gift from God, allowing believers to experience divine life now.

In the Old Testament reading, Abraham responded with faith to the promise that God would be with him and his descendants. Abraham and his wife Sarah set out on his journey, not knowing where the Spirit would take them.

The reading in the book of Romans makes it clear that faith must be our first response to God. God didn’t choose Abraham for his works. If God’s favor to us is based on our works, then we all have failed. God’s love and grace to us is not a transaction. It cannot be purchased, negotiated or taken away. God’s love and grace is experienced through faith.

It was Jesus who said in Luke 18. Unless we have the faith of a child, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

The second time Nicodemus is mentioned is in chapter 7.

Jesus is in Galilee. The Galileans who are Jewish are regarded by the Pharisees as coarse, lacking education. After the feeding of the 5000 in John 6, Jesus experiences a rough patch of ministry after he gives his “I am the bread of life teaching”. Many of his followers, finding this teaching too difficult to believe, desert him.

Jesus goes to Judea for the Feast of the Tabernacles. Once again, the teachings of Jesus cause division.

The chief priests and Pharisees send out the temple guards to arrest Jesus.

When the temple guards return, they asked, “Why didn’t you bring him in?” The guards replied, “No one ever spoke the way this man does.”

Nicodemus defends Jesus on a point of law. “Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?”

His colleagues issue a swift reply, “Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee.” The Pharisees question his loyalty. Are you one of them?

Instead of answering the question, the Pharisees respond with distraction. They challenge Nicodemus to find evidence of prophets who came from Galilee. They sidestep the truth that several prophets originated from or ministered in Galilee, including Jonah, Hosea, Elisha, and Elijah.

What do these stories of Nicodemus teach us today?

In the first passage, we learn that faith is a response to God’s great love for us. It is a great mystery. Jesus tells Nicodemus, the wind blows wherever it pleases. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

We can come to Jesus at any time. Even under the cover of darkness. We may not understand the spiritual mysteries, we can approach God with our broken, messy lives. Jesus is waiting to meet us.

It all begins with a step of faith.

In the second passage, we learn from Nicodemus that it is okay to stick your neck out. He took a risk, and he was verbally dismissed. Apparently, the tactics of intimidation and distraction are centuries old.

Have you ever been verbally ridiculed or received constructive criticism for something you said? Our natural response is one of discouragement, hurt, and embarrassment.

Our logic goes something like this:

When we try something or share something we think is important, we often treat the outcome as validation.

If it succeeds, then we're smart and the idea is worth doing. If it fails, then we are foolish and have wasted valuable time.

We lose confidence in our efforts to respond in a meaningful way.

How do we move forward as an individual, or as a church to share the love of Jesus without fear.

Recent sermons at St. Barnabas have focused on the rate of change that is happening within our nation. We feel helpless and discouraged. We don't know which issue to tackle first. We second guess the outcome. Will anyone read my letter? Does it make a difference? Will my phone message be deleted? Do I need to protest? I'm just one person; no one will miss me.

There is only one remedy for that. Be curious. Do something.

Instead of focusing on an outcome, try to approach your efforts with curiosity. Think of it as an experiment. Faith is a lot like curiosity. You don't always know where God will lead you, or what the outcome. Jesus told Nicodemus, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Walt Disney said, "Curiosity keeps leading us down new paths."

When we reframe our actions as an experiment or look on situations with curiosity, we remove the pressure to be perfect, to win, be successful, or earn recognition. Author Brene Brown wrote "Vulnerability is not about winning; it is not about losing. It is having the courage to show up when you can't control the outcome."

Finally, we see in John 19, Nicodemus buys a mixture of myrrh and other spices to prepare Jesus' body and for his burial.

I don't think Nicodemus had any idea how important his role was in history. Unwittingly, Nicodemus fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus death and set in motion the the events of the Resurrection.

In the Catholic Church, Nicodemus is recognized as the patron saint of **curiosity**, particularly for those seeking a deeper understanding of faith. And because he assisted Joseph with the burial of Jesus, he is also considered a patron saint of undertakers, pallbearers, and funeral directors.

Gandhi said, "You may never know what results come of your actions, but if you do nothing, there will be no result."

The ripple effects of our actions—big or small—may be beyond our immediate understanding, but they matter nonetheless.

Historian Heather Cox Richardson said, "We have one torch to bear. Now is the time to carry the torch, with intention. We may be called to be with our families or children. Volunteer in our communities. Called caregiving or prayer. Called to active engagement for peace, called to encourage our co-workers. Now is the time to carry the torch."

God so loved the world. May we know that love, and in faith respond with the courage of Nicodemus.