

## Nicodemus and Us

Today we've heard stories about two powerful men.

The first was the story of Abraham- his "call."- (when he was still known as Abram) –

The second was the beginning of what we know about Nicodemus.

The men were alike in several ways-

Abram was prominent in his home country of Haran-

When the voice of the Lord told him to go to a country that the Lord would show him

he was seventy five years old- he had considerable wealth- livestock- a wife, Sari-\

He was dug in at Haran- it didn't really make much sense for him to leave his

place of security to go to some unknown country-

even if a voice did promise him that he'd become a great nation-

after all, he and Sari didn't even have any children at that point.

That was faith!

Someone has called the story of Abraham "Faith as a Vocation"-

Thomas Cahill has said that two of the boldest words in all of literature are simply

"Abraham went."

Although they were armed only with an impossible promise- Abraham and Sarah went.

It was the beginning of faith as vocation.

Nicodemus, a few thousand years later- was a prominent man, too.

He obviously was a mature man to have attained his status

as a member of the governing body of the Temple-

he was a Pharisee- a member of the Sanhedrin-

I suppose in our time - he might be a senator-

or maybe a member of the Supreme Court-

I'd love to know how he'd heard about Jesus- his curiosity must have really been piqued

for him to sneak out under the cover of darkness and hunt Jesus up-

It's clear he didn't want to be seen with Jesus- so- when it was good and dark

he gathered his courage and he went and found Jesus-

—"Rabbi, he says, "we know that you are a teacher who has come from God

because no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God"

It was a nice preamble- He acknowledges Jesus as a teacher- and he's clearly impressed.

It wasn't a bad way to open a conversation but if Nicodemus was looking for an

explanation of the works Jesus does, , he clearly didn't get one.

Jesus , as he often does, begins to speak on one level- the level of the Spirit-

and poor Nicodemus frantically tries to make sense of what Jesus is saying

The only language Nicodemus understands is language on an earthly level-

- a practical level- and he never really catches up- :

Jesus says to see the Kingdom of God you must be born from above (anew, again) –

Nicodemus has no idea what Jesus is talking about-

in his world, being born is physical birth- it just doesn't compute-

Jesus talks about the wind blowing where it will- believing in the Son of Man-

God loving the world so much that he gives his only Son.

You have to feel sorry for Nicodemus- his head must have been reeling

We wonder when Nicodemus left and wandered back out in to the night-

We don't know- We wonder whether he ever understood what Jesus meant?

We don't really know that for sure either-

but one thing's for certain- Nicodemus had just been invited to begin a journey

into a new realm – and we hope that he, like Abraham- went! –

-that he went in obedience to a calling that was beyond his understanding-

Much later- when Jesus' body is taken down from the cross-

Nicodemus shows up and helps Joseph of Arimathea (who was called a 'secret' disciple)

with the burial of Jesus' body-

and he brings about a hundred pounds of spices with him

to prepare Jesus' body for burial—

Did he ever 'get it'. I'd like to think he did- but we don't really know-

-because his story is ambiguous –

Was he a secret disciple too, like Joseph of Arimathea,?

Did he ever come into the light- or did he remain in the shadows-

-never quite able to come out and say he believed

and become a part of the new Way of Jesus?

Margaret B. Hess has written this imaginative view of Nicodemus,

pondering what we might like to ask- if only we could ask him about his dilemma.

It's called "The puzzle of Nicodemus:

"What a curious man you are, Nicodemus. Only the cold, heavily lidded eye of the moon  
sees you making your way through the darkened streets.

The records indicate that you are a man of light and reason, a learned man,  
steeped in the discipline of scholarship.

Yet here you are, driven by your curiosity. Pulled by your insatiable desire  
to figure out just who this man Jesus really is to you.

You begin with a statement and set the stage for a speech.

But underneath you have a thousand questions. So do we.

Nicodemus, you are experienced in detecting the subtle nuances in the thought of a rabbi.

You are skilled in finding the loopholes in logic,  
articulate in the intricacies of the faith.

Why is it that you stumble here? You follow your curiosity  
and find yourself walking on thin air.

Jesus speaks and you fan at the words, trying to coax them into an intelligible pattern.

He says one thing "You must be born from above"; yet you hear another.

What does it mean, you must be born again? How on earth can such a thing happen?

Confusion is the unintended consequence of your curiosity, Nicodemus,  
but don't stop there.

Think about it: if you're born again, then you must grow up again.

Think about your life, Nicodemus.

What would you do differently if you had half the chance?

How would you grow up differently? How would you re-edit the narrative of your life

As you enter more deeply into your puzzlement, Nicodemus,

you'll find that Jesus is inviting you to be curious about your life,

and to rethink your assumptions with an altered perspective.

You are challenged not only to conduct an autopsy on your past,

but to look to the future through the eyes of redemptive possibility.

How might your life be different if you were born again?

How would your life be altered if you truly believed, from the beginning,

that God loves you with a sacrificial love?

Nicodemus, patron saint of the curious, we see you in the flickering firelight,

your face an arresting mixture of confusion and interest.

Jesus waits, the sound broken only by the sound of the wind

banging the shutter against the house.

You tug at your beard and rethink your life,

seeing your past and future through the eyes of the One who loves you.

You are dizzy with the possibility of it all.

And so are we!

Born again? The mere thought of it sends us reeling.

You mean to tell us that our lives might be different?

There's some of Nicodemus in us all.

How could our lives be different if we entered into this thing called new birth?

What would it be like to stand fully in the light of God's love?

to hold nothing back – to trust him fully?

To be ready to go wherever we're called?"

Can we enter into Faith as a Vocation- as Abraham did?

Think about it- just think- *Amen.*