



The Second Sunday of Lent (A)
March 8, 2020
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Just imagine this scenario, if you will:

“Guess what I heard today? What’s that? Late last night, Mary saw Nicodemus go into the house where that prophet and peacher, Jesus, is staying. She saw him go in with his head and face partially covered. What a scandal! He’s a vested member of the Sanhedrin, the highest court in the land, and a super respected member of the Jewish elite. What on earth could he be doing with that controversial Jesus character? I know, right! His reputation is on the line. Just wait until I tell my fishing buddies at the Galilee Boating Club, you tell your colleagues at your office and then the senior citizens get ahold of this information! Nicodemus needs to be more careful, to be sure.”

And so, it goes. Most of us realize that gossip can be and often is destructive. Gossip can be harmful to the person about whom it is intended. I contend that it is also harmful to the person perpetrating it.

Gossip takes energy, perhaps causes the heart to accelerate and may cause similar reactions for others as it spreads from one person to another. It is infectious. In today’s climate in which it seems that virtually anything goes, that anything can be said true or false without seeming consequence, gossip feeds the fuel of a flame that has become a staple in society.

We could spend much time thinking about such conversations including ‘parking lot’ conversations, you know, those conversations after meetings at work, after a school board meeting, after a family gathering or even after church. What might have been discussed in person, wasn’t, and the subsequent conversation becomes a new forum outside the parameters of healthy discussion.

These days, there seems to be something in the air that enables some people to aim arrows of chatter which can take on a life of their own. Such conversations can take on a life of their own.

Denial of truth can take on a life of its own. Without all the facts in play and knowledge shared, good people and their good will can become targets of destructive chatter. Journey with me, if you will, to imagine Nicodemus as the object of such chatter! Imagine if even those who cared about Nicodemus didn’t bother to ask him about his motives for meeting with Jesus. Admittedly, the Gospel doesn’t tell us anything about that but every story has context and potential subtexts. Today’s story about Nicodemus is perhaps one of them.

To be sure, we believe that the Gospel is the truth of Jesus Christ. We believe that Nicodemus did indeed exist, and I believe that his story is our story. Nicodemus goes to Jesus under the cover of darkness, a powerful symbol, of its own. He went to Jesus because he sought light.

John 8:12 reminds us that Jesus is “the light of the world, the light that no darkness can overcome”. Something inside Nicodemus knew that. It was compelling. It enabled him to seek out Jesus and to risk his own reputation in doing so. His encounter with Jesus wasn’t a sugar-coated chat! Jesus challenged Nicodemus and challenges us as well. So, what do we make of this character in the Gospel? Can we see ourselves in him on this the Second Sunday of Lent?

My guess is that we, like Nicodemus, seek light in the midst of the darkness around us. On one level, the Coronavirus is about darkness. There is little known about it, its spread and its potential for taking life. The terrible and super destructive tornadoes which ravaged Tennessee last week and took many lives is about darkness, the need to better understand changes in climate and the need for recovery and light.

I can’t imagine that there is one person in this church who hasn’t experienced significant darkness in life. And yet, are we not here this morning because we long for the light of Jesus to fill us and our world with a way of living which brings life to us and others?

Last month, the Vestry of the Parish began a set of discussions. One involved the new Safety Manual, a three-year project in the making, which will inform policies and procedures to help provide as safe an environment at St. Mark’s as possible. The other involved conflict resolution, a policy and procedure which when adopted by the Vestry may become part of the Parish’s By-Laws in the future.

These conversations and documents shed light on how we can better live life together as a Parish. They seek to bring us out of darkness into light. They provide strategies for life-giving procedures and will help us keep light flowing in and through us in different but similar ways.

What are the procedures in our lives of faith which enable light for us? How do we go about informing ourselves as followers of Jesus in ways which are life-giving for us and those around us? Can today’s story about Nicodemus shed some light on how we approach Jesus in our relationship with him, a relationship which needs to be nourished and fed?

The Gospel tells us that the story of Nicodemus didn’t end that night. John 19:38 tells us that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus after the crucifixion and laid it in a newly hewn tomb. The tomb belonged to Joseph.

Nicodemus was perhaps forever changed because of a late-night encounter with the man named Jesus. We are invited to encounter Jesus, be transformed and be catalysts of life for others.

Today’s Gospel from John concludes with a famous text which many Christians can quote verbatim. John 3:16 pretty much tells us what we need to know about our loving God.

God so loves us that God offered God’s own self in Jesus so that we might have life now and forever. Can we embrace the light of that life and allow the love of God in Jesus to inform who we are and how we live our lives?

Lent provides us with an opportunity to reorient our lives as followers of Jesus. Lent gives us tools to be ‘good’ Christians, ‘good’ followers of Jesus, ‘good’ stewards of the love which is ours in Jesus. For that love, that life, that sacrifice, we can be most grateful. Amen.