

Second Sunday of Lent - SPR - Rev. Shawn Evelyn

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Jesus also said, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?” It is pretty easy to look at our Gospel for today and look at Nicodemus as a villain or even incompetent. He is a pharisee, so already we might think he is this ultra conservative religious leader who has it all wrong. He comes and meets Jesus in secret under the cover of night, and we might think he is afraid and has to scurry around like a rat so people won’t talk bad about him for being seen with Jesus. He questions what Jesus tells him so we might think, he is a fool, he is a teacher who is not supposed to be teaching and should find another line of work. Whether we are right or wrong about all of this, we have to admit that it is possible to see a little Nicodemus in all of us. We can be very active in our churches but not be the best Christians. We are not open with what we believe and may have even downplayed our love of God. We can be good in the work that we do in our professional lives, but it is never good enough. We can be successful, but we may not be happy with where our lives are going. At some point in our lives I am sure we have all related to these things and much much more. If you are following what I am saying then you know that I am not calling you out, I am not trying to make you out to be a villain, or see to our own incompetence, or have you question your life choices.

I am here to remind you that this is normal, our lives are rooted in a dualism as we try to be good Christians and live in a world that mostly separates itself from a higher calling. I am also here to remind you that this is what Lent is about. This is why we reorder our lives to God, this is why we where we fast and meditate on Jesus and not only because of what is to come in Easter, but for what is going to happen in Holy Week. It is all because of Faith. When we struggle for understanding, when we lose our confidence, when we don’t trust ourselves we too find ourselves in the same predicament that Nicodemus was in. Don’t get me wrong, these are

different situations and the contexts are not the same. Or are they? “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Seeing is believing, and we see that Nicodemus believes, the problem is that he does not have Faith, he doesn’t have Faith in what he sees, he doesn’t have Faith in what he believes, and finally he doesn’t have Faith in Jesus. He understands that Jesus is sent from God, there are signs, miracles to back it up, he just does not have Faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

I said earlier that this is what we are here to correct. Yes we are to love God with all of our heart, all of our mind, and all of our soul, but that’s hard to do. When we focus on our Faith, the task becomes a little less difficult. Especially in this season of Lent, we experience Christ’s triumphant rise. He becomes a king, then becomes public enemy number one, and is put to death because of it. Yes he is prophesied to save us, but despite all of this, out of all the suffering, out of all the pain, I believe what hurt Jesus the most was that those who were closest to him, lost Faith in him. Lent is our opportunity to learn from the events of the past so as to not repeat them. When we look to Easter and overlook Holy Week, we are doomed to repeat history.

Abraham or Abram as we know him in today’s reading, is the quintessential posterboy for Faith. Our reading from Genesis is brief but it shows us that Abraham had Faith. They just gave us a detailed genealogy about the Great Flood with Noah, and the children that came from it tracing it all down to Abram. Now I learned a lot of things in my Old Testament classes but one thing I learned is that whenever there is a list, or a genealogy of some kind, it is important, it may be boring to the reader, but it gives a foundation for identity and that means a lot. God tells Abram to leave everything he knows, to leave his home and family, to remove himself from this genealogy, this identity, so that God can build a nation around him, so that God can provide a family for him who thought he was in a position where he would not have children, it sounds so absurd that all Sarah can eventually do is laugh. Paul recognizes Faith and that Faith without

works is dead. He tells the Roman community that following the law to its literal interpretation means nothing if it does not have Faith and uses Abraham to express this.

My sisters and brothers I know you may have heard the story of Nicodemus many times in the past, and you may have formed your own opinions of how he is a model for all the things good church going folk ought not to be. But I invite you, I invite you to see where you our lives intersect with him. Where we say we believe, but we are not fully on board, where our Faith falters and is not all the way there. If you can see that, then you could see we are not good to ourselves, or even the people around us. It is in the words of our Psalm that help us to articulate our Faith. "My help comes from the Lord...the Lord never shall neither slumber nor sleep... the Lord watches over you... the Lord shall preserve you from all evil and keep you safe... the Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in from this time forth for evermore." As you continue along in your Lenten journey, work on your Faith, and pay attention to it. Also, keep your eyes on the events of Holy Week and how they shaped the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Don't be hard on yourself when your Lenten practice does not turn out the way you planned. Remember the Gospel for today is a narrative of human nature interacting with the divine. It is in our hubris that makes us think we have the answers when we truly don't know what is going on. Nicodemus learned from his interaction with Christ, and would later speak up for Jesus urging that he not be arrested but at least get a fair trial, and it was the same Nicodemus who received his body after it was taken down from the cross, wrapped it in linens and perfumes, so that Jesus can make his miraculous return from death. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." So that everyone who believes, may their Faith also be strong. Amen.