

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday in Lent (A) – John 3:1-17

Discipleship: *An Instrument of Pardon and Faith*

Focus Question: *This week how might you be an instrument of God's pardon and faith?*

word of life

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16 (NRSV)

Read John 3:1-17

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus is a religious leader and a teacher, but he is also a seeker. It is his faith seeking understanding which brings him to Jesus. He comes at night perhaps out of fear or maybe to have sufficient time for his discussion with Jesus. The point is Nicodemus takes an active stance to learn and understand from Jesus.

1. *Describe how you imagine this evening dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus.*
2. *How do you picture Nicodemus?*

Nicodemus begins the conversation with a statement of his belief in Jesus as a teacher who comes from God. Jesus responds by inviting Nicodemus to see God's kingdom by being born from above. Nicodemus struggles with the teaching of Jesus and gets stuck in the literal image of being born a second time from a mother's womb.

As is typical in the Gospel of John, the words in this passage are used on several levels. Jesus is not talking about the physical birth process, but rather the spiritual transformation of a person who is reborn because of the Holy Spirit's work in his or her life. Nicodemus asks, “How can these things be?” (John 3:9 NRSV) That is a great question of faith asked by seekers of all ages who desire greater understanding.

3. *How would you answer the question of Nicodemus, “How can these things be?”*
4. *How can asking questions help a disciple of Jesus grow in faith?*
5. *What if we don't ask questions? Does that mean we have full understanding of God and God working in this world? Explain.*

In infinite wisdom, God chooses to be made known through Jesus Christ, who walks and relates to people on this earth on their terms. At the same time, Jesus invites people to think on God's terms and to imagine heavenly things. Jesus invites people to stretch and be stirred by God's Spirit. He encourages disciples to ponder and believe in heavenly things.

6. *If Nicodemus, a learned man of God, has trouble understanding heavenly things, what hope is there for those less learned?*
7. *What are people to do with their doubts?*
8. *At what point does faith enter into the process?*
9. *After the conversation with Nicodemus ended, what do you think happened to Nicodemus and his faith?*

This dialogue with Nicodemus includes John 3:16, one of the most beloved passages of scripture. Here Jesus sums up the faith. God loved the world to such a degree that God would willingly and passionately give over Jesus, God's own son, to suffer and to be killed so eternal life might extend to those who believe in Jesus. Thanks be to God for the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith, helping us to trust in God and the words of John 3:16. The outcome is transformed lives of those who believe and live in the world as instruments of God.

10. *What does John 3:16 mean to you?*

word among us

Nicodemus and St. Francis of Assisi had some things in common. Both were educated men who chose to ask questions. For Nicodemus, his questions led to more questions and a struggle to sort out the answers into a belief system. Likewise, St. Francis had questions which led to more questions. He struggled mightily with his faith and how his faith was to be lived out in daily life.

St. Francis grew up in wealth and enjoyed material pleasures. But while serving in the military, he became ill. As he recovered, he began a thorough self-examination process. As he struggled, his relationships with family and friends changed. Not all around him appreciated his internal struggle and discernment process. He wasn't as willing to go out and party. He no longer took joy in the material pleasures around him.

There is a story of St Francis towards the end of this extended discernment process where things came together for him. He attended a church service and was so moved by the message, he left church and took off his outer clothing, including his shoes, and began his mission to live a simple life of love, humility, poverty, and service. This was the result of much struggle, questions, and prayer.

1. *Imagine the reaction of his family and friends. Describe.*
2. *Have you or someone you know ever gone through such a transformation?*

Some people might say it is better not to ask questions of God. "Just believe." But it is hard to live life and not ask questions. Bad things happen to very good people. Promises made by humans get broken. Life can be rough. We experience hurts and we hurt others. Sometimes we hurt the people we love. We wonder. We doubt. We don't quite get "life." Questions come.

3. *At what point of your life have you had the most questions of God?*
4. *When is the last time you wrestled with God? Who won?*

Some would say, "Don't ask God a question unless you are willing to hear and deal with the answer!" God might just want to change you. It's true. The Holy Spirit is persistent in stirring, nudging and drawing people closer to Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to call, gather, and enlighten, helping people move from doubt to faith.

Yet, change is not easy. It is tempting to remain in a comfort zone, even if it is not perfect. Change can mean struggling with new thinking, attitudes, choices, and values.

5. *Imagine someone saying to you, "God wants me to change, but I don't really want to change." How would you respond?*
6. *In what areas of your life is the Holy Spirit nudging you to change?*

Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, where there is injury, let me sow pardon; where there is doubt, faith. Amen

Dig Deeper

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

last word

Pray each day this week:

Lord, make me an
instrument of your peace,
where there is injury, let me sow pardon;
where there is doubt, faith.



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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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