

All Saints Episcopal Church

Steenrijk

Willemstad, Curacao

The Second Sunday in Lent (A)

March 5, 2023

DRAFT

“For God So Loved the World”

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel – John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named
Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He
came to Jesus by night and said to him,

“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.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and

what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have

told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal 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. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn

the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

May our actions and deeds show forth the One sent from God, Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

Dear Lord, you have given us that life that never ends, and we are ever grateful. Amen.

Episcopal Priest John Claypool told a story a number of years ago. A family

had been living in Richmond, Virginia, while the father had been assigned to do work there. Their home was near Monument Avenue, one of the major thoroughfares in Richmond. That is where statues have been erected in honor of the Confederate generals of the Civil War, the most notable, of course, being the one of Robert E. Lee. Lee is shown sitting on his horse, holding the reins of his bowing steed. The only caption of the monument is found on the base, and it simply reads, "Lee."

This family had a young son who enjoyed playing at Lee's statue. Word comes that the father is being transferred to another city. On the day they are moving, the little boy asks his father if he can play one more time at Lee.

"Sure," his Dad says, "in fact I'll go with you." After a while the Dad tells his son that they need to leave. "Dad, I do have one question before we go." "Yes, son, what is it?" "Who is that man sitting on Lee?"

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/john-31-17-the-gospel-at-night-hyde>

We sometimes focus on Nicodemus in the gospel story without realizing he was speaking directly to the Son of God, Jesus. What an amazing opportunity Nicodemus had. But what would you ask Jesus if you had one silent night hour alone with Jesus? What questions about life and death or anything else would possibly be on your mind?

Nicodemus thought he was trying to understand from where Jesus' great miraculous abilities came. And Jesus quickly brings the conversation to an

analysis of Nicodemus' ultimate fate. Was Nicodemus willing to be born anew; was Nicodemus willing for God to rebirth him spiritually? Jesus focuses on life and death matters quickly in this dialogue. It makes me review conversations I have had with unbelievers, whether I spent my precious minutes with them to ask if they have answered ultimate questions about their eternal fate. We are so concerned about political correctness, such as is Allah the same as the Christian God or not? When at some point I should have asked my

New York cab driver who was very versed in Paul's writings if he was certain of his ultimate fate after this life. He did not believe in the rest of God; he thought his faith clearly indicated that God never rests. His religion did not at all acknowledge the Genesis stories and their wisdom. But God's rest is just what we Christians expect when this life is over. If there is no rest in God, then how can we find our rest in the afterlife? Without the Sabbath rest on earth, our lives would drone on and on with no stopping. This is a problem in our

culture, so many are trying to make the very next dollar, achieve the very next word of praise from the public, gain the very next thing that will make us feel superior to someone else in our culture. So, too very many are not focusing on the really important things of life.

Maybe we put our family second to our job. Maybe we put even our church work ahead of our family. There are all sorts of things that render us less than approachable to the Nicodemus' of the world. Who else can they ask about the ultimate questions of life and death?

Jesus is depending on us to help them find their way to the salvation of God. How have we been the urgently needed source of spiritual guidance for others in their questioning of life and its meaning?

Are we riding Lee, the horse of life, or is the horse of life riding us? And let us ask the same question about our closest friends and relatives and acquaintances. Are we able to guide them in a way to find spiritual health and life eternal?

Fred Craddock, the late Professor of Preaching and New Testament Emeritus

in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, tells about a young man who had been one of his students. Before he went to seminary, the man was a special education teacher. He left teaching because he found it, he said, to be too hard. It culminated one November when school resumed after Thanksgiving break. As he tells the story, he went up to a beautiful little girl on the playground, called her by name, and asked her, “How was your Thanksgiving?” The little girl stared blankly and said, “My shoes are red.”

There was something in her brain, the young man explained, that wouldn't let her connect with the world around her. The only thing she could say was, "My shoes are red." Her response, he told Craddock, just broke the teacher's heart. And so, the teacher chose to take his life in another direction, one he thought that might not be so hard emotionally for him to do.

Craddock says that not long after that he was in Dallas visiting some friends. They went to church together on Sunday morning. The music was most

inspirational, Craddock explains. The prayers were well thought-out, the sermon was strong--a good and challenging interpretation of the scripture. The congregation sang the hymns with meaning, and when the benediction was spoken, Craddock says, he didn't want to move. He was truly inspired by the experience. He just wanted to sit there for a while and let it soak in slowly.

Just at that moment, a man who had been sitting in front of him, turned and extended his hand. "So," he said rather

loudly, “you think Tom Landry’s going to coach the Cowboys this year?” “You know what he was really saying?”

Craddock asks. “He was saying, ‘My shoes are red.’” He just didn’t get it.

Suppose you had only one son.

Would you let him be killed to make a point? That is exactly what God did at Calvary. He let his only Son be crucified on a cruel cross. God was not a sadist, but God saw that the only way we humans could possibly learn how to trust God was to go to the ultimate end of human life in his Son Jesus Christ. God

thought that maybe, just maybe, if we look on this wretched sacrifice of his Son that we might be stirred from our lethargy and finally focus on the ultimate point of life, that this life is not the end. God's Son would rise to life again in three days.

Writer Hal Luccock says, "The deadliest rival of Christianity is Nostalgia." And isn't that so true! As we cling to the past we are unable to be carried by the wind of the Spirit to new horizons, new challenges, new insights. The past seems so safe because we have

already lived the past. But what we need is the courage to face the future. The future is always changing and challenging. It is up to us to find a way we can meet those changes in the future. By the power of the Holy Spirit working within us we can find the way around the obstacles ahead of us.

We either regenerate or we degenerate. We must have God's presence with us to live life anew and face all our tomorrows.

Many people are "positively disposed" towards Christ, somewhat like

Nicodemus, but they won't take that final step of faith of putting their whole trust in Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God. They want to hold back a little, or even a lot. They want to check out all the other possibilities first, and then make a reasoned and rational decision. But the Spirit does not work that way. The Spirit is unpredictable. The Holy Spirit could be speaking to us, to you, right now. We cannot dictate to the Holy Spirit. We can only humbly follow the dictates of God.

Test the Spirit if you are uncertain about what God is telling you. Is what

you are called to do loving, compassionate, and caring for all concerned? Is the outcome something we would want for ourselves? Can we put ourselves into some else's position and then agree what we are about to do is positive for them and for us?

Test the Spirit. Do we find the appropriate verses of scripture that say what we are about to do is appropriate and wise. Do we have wise Christian counsel telling us that what we are about to do is appropriate and wise? Does our common sense also tell us we are acting

appropriately and wisely? If God gave us a brain we should be using it. God did not make junk. We are made in God's very own image as a sensing, thinking, feeling being. We too are spirit and flesh as was God's Son Jesus Christ. So Jesus has already experienced our human difficulties. Our Lord has been one of us. He understands our frailties, temptations, and shortcomings, yet still intercedes constantly for us to his Father, our Father in heaven.

So this Lent let us bow down and reaffirm our reliance on God in our lives.

For by our humility before God, God will work mighty deeds of love in our day to day world. And by the grace of God, many will be saved.

May we allow God's love to come into our heart through believing in Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Tags: Nicodemus, Jesus, salvation, save, God, Christ, Calvary, family, friends, acquaintances, Craddock, Lent,

Confederate, Lee, horse, Richmond,
Virginia, Dallas, Cowboys, Landry, red,
shoes, teacher, Son, only, sacrifice,
killed, heaven, earth, sun, President, rich,
famous, redeeming, political,
correctness, pride, humility, monument,
statue

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