

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night

*1 March 2026, 2nd Sunday in Lent: Reflection on Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 and John 3:1-17 –
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Do you have a favourite gospel?

I'm not suggesting there aren't important stories in all of them, but for most people there is a particular gospel narrative that resonates best with them.

Is it the Gospel of John?

I was slightly surprised this week to discover that John is regularly found to be the most popular gospel amongst Christians. Goodreads (an Amazon subsidiary), puts the percentage of people preferring John at a staggering 43%. It is my favourite, but speaking into the context of a seminary, Mark and Luke seem to be the ones most people will profess to prefer. Mark because it's the old one. Luke because it's the two-parter that goes with Acts.

John can be treated as a bit suspect – it doesn't line up with the others and goes off in its own wild direction. Nevertheless, it is the gospel we get the famous seven 'I am statements'. It's the gospel of the Wedding at Cana, the resurrection of Lazarus and Thomas' doubt. It is unambiguous that Jesus of Nazareth is divine. It is poetic and full of rich metaphorical interpretations within its stories of Jesus.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night. There are good worldly reasons for why Lazarus visits Jesus by night. Perhaps there is an element of shame that he is visiting this troublesome Rabbi? But this is John's Gospel and the night is also symbolic of Nicodemus' ignorance, while Jesus is the light of the world.

He approaches Jesus apparently certain that God is with him from the signs he performs, yet he is confused by Jesus' responses. His faith, based on the certainty of the material world is shaken and reformed. While the scene ends without telling us Nicodemus' final reaction, it does become clear later in John's Gospel where Nicodemus moves to, first, advocating for Jesus (in Chapter 7), to helping with his burial (in Chapter 19), accepting the risks of associating with Christ, even in the days before the resurrection. Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, but leaves illuminated.

During the conversation, Jesus shifts the topic from being about the signs to discussing the inwards nature of the workings of the Spirit. Yes, there are signs, but to truly 'see the Kingdom of God', Nicodemus must be 'born of the Spirit'. In essence, Nicodemus is asked by Jesus to abandon some of his certainties about the world, to let God and the Spirit reform him into something new. He comes to Jesus by night, but the door is opened to allow Nicodemus to glimpse the kingdom of God.

This theme is reflected in the story of Abraham narrated in Romans this week. 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'. Abraham 'received the promise that he would be heir of the world, through the righteousness that comes by faith'. In

essence, Abraham didn't do anything to become the 'father of many nations'. Rather, he trusted in God and allowed God to work within him, to transform him.

And that poses an interesting question for us when reflecting on our own lives in this Lenten Season.

It can be very tempting to look back at the Gospels and imagine that our faith, with the benefit of our understanding of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ, is fully formed. When we do that, we become like Nicodemus, approaching Christ with the certainty of signs. We come to Jesus by night. And like Nicodemus we are called upon to open our hearts, through prayer, to the workings of the Spirit within us.

When we assume that we have the answers already, we close ourselves off to the workings of the Spirit. While, as Christians we are absolutely called to speak out against injustice, can we do so in ways that allow us to continue to have respectful dialogue across political and theological divides?

Can we allow room for the working of the Spirit in our lives and in our communities?

Absolute certainty can so often shut the door on that. When we draw lines in the sand rather than constructing bridges we not only commit the sin of Pride, we not only close down the possibility of coming to understand another perspective, and not only close down the possibility of others understanding our own, but we close down the ability of the Spirit to work within us. We continue to operate in the darkness and don't allow the possibility of being changed by the light.

And on the topic of our wider Anglican Church, can we be tempted to see our way of doing things as the true Anglican way? Can we at times fall into the trap of assuming that our form of spiritual expression is the best one and that other expressions are in some way worse, or at the very least 'less Anglican' than our own?

Perhaps we can learn something from other expressions of religiosity? Perhaps we aren't the keepers of all that is holy.

In this gospel narrative, Jesus does not call on us to do anything specific, but merely to keep our hearts malleable to the working of the Spirit. We may not understand what God's plans are, but there are there, '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. '

Jesus does not arm Nicodemus with the tools to cunningly defeat his opponents in battles of wit and convince others of the validity of the Gospel message. He does not immediately convert him. Rather, Jesus instructs him to open up to the Spirit.

If I may leave you with a closing thought. In meditating on these on verses, Professor Emerson Powery wrote this:

Jesus calls for a transformation of the self, not of the world. Perhaps our political debates should be carefully calibrated to think about how they might shape us as human beings and not only to develop strategies for how to win arguments. May God's Spirit blow upon all

who enter into those contested spaces with humility, curiosity, and longing for true relationships and more robust communities. May we—with Nicodemus—sense God’s presence so that we may see and testify to God’s activities in the world!

Amen.