



Sunday March 1, 2026

Second Sunday in Lent

Welcome again my friends. As we start this season of Lent, for the next several weeks, we're going to be hearing from John and we're going to be hearing each week about an individual whose life was changed by knowing Jesus, by coming in contact with Jesus, by learning through Jesus, by experiencing the friendship and love of Christ. So, today we're going to deal with Nicodemus who we heard in the Gospel lesson, and we're going to walk through friendship and then disciple. That friendship, it's not flashy, there's no dramatic miracles happening to Nicodemus, he doesn't give stern speeches, but if you look carefully at the narrative in John, the whole picture of Nicodemus throughout John, you see a soul that was transformed, one question at a time, one risk at a time, and so this timid seeker becomes a courageous follower.

So, Nicodemus is today the model for us, as we pursue our Lenten practices to draw closer to Jesus. Let's begin by remembering who Nicodemus was, remembering how Jesus tells us in our reading today that he was a man of the Pharisees, he was a leader of the Jews, he had status, he had education and influence in society. He would have known all the laws, the traditions, the scriptures, yet he was open and willing to ask questions. But, he brought his questions to Jesus at night, and that detail is significant. Coming at night tells us that although Nicodemus is intrigued by Jesus, he has questions and cares about the truth, but he's afraid. He's afraid of losing his reputation, afraid of being misread by his peers, perhaps afraid of what answers that Jesus gives him, and what may let that may require of him. How many times have we behaved like that, huh? How many times have we hidden our questions because we're too afraid to ask them, too embarrassed how we're going to look when we have a question in front of others.



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But in this night time meeting, Nicodemus speaks language of a scholar and a leader, he says, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher from God, for no one can do the signs that you do apart from the presence of God." And how does Jesus answer him with unsettled, specific certainty? "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without first being born from above." Think about what that must have sounded like to Nicodemus. His theological training didn't provide an easy ladder to this new way of thinking. Jesus insisted that knowing God isn't merely a matter of intellect or pedigree. It's a radical rebirth. Jesus, who is patient and unhurried, keeps inviting him into this mystery. He talks about wind, unseen, mysterious, but evident in its effects. He talks about the Son of Man lifted up drawing people to himself, and he talks finally about God's love for all of us. For God so loved the world, and He gave His only Son. So, in that meeting, we see Jesus do two things that friendship always does, and Jesus always does for us, answers honestly, and He refuses to lead Nicodemus where he was. He offers an invitation to a new life, a new life, one of the slaughter in the spirit.

What follows in the Gospel is not a sudden conversion story with instant headlines. Instead, we watch through John, Nicodemus having this slow, credible transformation, because later we see in chapter 7 we see Nicodemus again not in the secrecy of the night, but in the public tension of a council chamber that cheap priests and Pharisees are all gathered together, and they are ready to arrest Jesus, and the temple police have gone out and returned empty handed. The authorities are harsh and decisive, they want to bring Jesus down. But Nicodemus speaks up. It's not a dramatic defense, but he says, "Does our Lord judge someone without first giving them a hearing to find out



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what they're doing?" It may seem like a small question, but it marks a change in him. The man who once visited at night now risks the light of day in all his peers to call for fairness. He stands for justice. He recognizes that Jesus deserves to be heard. But Nicodemus moves carefully. His words are measured, but he is choosing to put principle now before appearance, a big step forward in his relationship with Jesus. And this is growth. Nicodemus is learning that faith is like having courage even when he had to be cautious. Friends of Jesus, us too, we often begin our journey in private. We all have our questions and fears. But following Jesus doesn't allow us to stay hidden. It raises us slowly into integrity, into living, into the truth, and what we are learning now in public counts, and what we are speaking forth publicly counts.

The final scene in John about Nicodemus is most striking. When Jesus dies, Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilot to ask for his body, and Nicodemus comes too carrying a great quantity of spices, about a hundred pounds by John's measure, a mixture of myrrh and aloes. These aren't just flowers, you toss on a grave. This is the costly time-consuming public care. He and Joseph wrap the body of Jesus in linen with the spices and lay it in the tomb. Think about this arc from night to tomb. Nicodemus, the cautious inquirer, becomes the mourner at the cross. A man who provides the tender, costly acts of love that no one else will. He risks his reputation to be associated with the crucified rabbi whom his peers have condemned. He gives not only curiosity, but honor, devotion and material sacrifice. He takes his place among those who love Jesus, even enough to do the work of mourning and burial. Nicodemus's transformation, we see, is not theatrical, but it is credible, it is costly, and it is human.



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So, what does this mean for us? This Lent, we are asked to bring forth whatever doubt and questions we have. Nicodemus came at night because he was afraid, but he came, and we are asked to wrestle with our fears, our uncertainties, our preference to hide in the night, but yet come forward. We are asked to bring out our hard questions, because Jesus did not scold him, Nicodemus, for his honesty, and he will not scold us. So, we have to bring our questions to Jesus and to a community that can wrestle with them honestly. We are asked in this time of Lent over the next weeks, to be patient with the slow work of transformation. Nicodemus didn't leap immediately into confession. Change takes time. If we feel the pressure to have everything figured out, it's not going to work, because discipleship is a process. Let spiritual growth be patient, small acts, standing up for justice, defending the neighbor, showing up for worship, that's the wind the spirit uses to shape us. And finally, we come to realize that faith costs. The spices that Nicodemus brought costs him materially and reputationally. The cross is a scandal to many, but the love that led Jesus to the cross calls us to risk for others.

So, our text today asks, are we willing to be like Nicodemus in our world. People who will be present at the crucifixion of others that is taking place in our world today. People who will bury injustice with the acts of mercy and courage. So, what may that look like the second week of Lent? Maybe it's getting honest about our struggles of faith. Maybe it's making small brave choices to stand up for someone who's being judged unfairly. Maybe it's offering what we have, time, money, care to someone who needs it, even if it means doing so, will cost you. Let me end with just this short invitation. Nicodemus' example teaches us that discipleship, again, with Jesus is patient, persistent, and



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practical, patient, persistent, and practical. It begins with curiosity and is sustained by courage. It is quiet, but it becomes public and costly. So, if we want to grow as Nicodemus did, and I hope we choose to, for this start as he did, bring your questions, our questions to the Lord, and allow those answers to change not only our ideas, but the trajectory of our very life. Amen.