



## *Nicodemus*

*Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:10-17*

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Why are we here? Why did God decide to join together two declining downtown congregations to form a new congregation—a federated congregation—and plant them on what was then the outskirts of Peoria?

In reflecting upon today's lessons I have come to the conclusion that we are here for all of the Nicodemuses of the world. Nicodemus had an itch he couldn't scratch. He had a hunger deep in his spirit. He came to Jesus at night—keeping with the motif of John's gospel; light and darkness.

As one of my favorite authors, Frederick Buechner tells the story of the conversation.

“Nicodemus had heard enough about Jesus was up to in Jerusalem to make him think he ought to pay him a visit and find out more. On the other hand, as a VIP with a big theological reputation to uphold, he decided it might be just as well to pay it at night. Better to be at least fairly safe than to be sorry, he thought, and waited till he thought his neighbors were all asleep.

“So Nicodemus was fairly safe, and, at least at the start of their nocturnal interview, Jesus was fairly patient. What the whole thing boiled down to, Jesus told him, was that unless you got born again, you might as well give up.

“That was all very well, Nicodemus said, but just how were you supposed to pull a thing like that off? How especially were you to pull it off if you were using sixty-five? How did you get born again when it was a challenge just to get out of bed in the morning? He even got a little sarcastic. Could a man ‘enter a second time into his mother's womb,’ he asked (John 3:4), when it was all he could do to enter a taxi without the driver's coming around to give him a shove from behind?

“A gust of wind happened to whistle down the chimney at that point, making the dying embers burst into flame, and Jesus said being born again was like that. I wasn't something you *did*. The wind did it. The Spirit did it. It was something that happened, for God's sake.” (pp. 121-122)

The story of Nicodemus is really a story about faith. Faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," the Letter to the Hebrews says (11:1).

The letter to the Romans talks about the nature of faith

*The promise made to Abraham and his descendants, that he would inherit the world, was not because of anything Abraham did or would do—it was based on God's decision. It is a matter of faith on our part and trust in God's generosity. This faith—trusting God and embracing him and what he does—is a pure gift. (Romans 4: 13-16, selected)*

Faith is not something that we can attain by our effort. It is given to us by God. We remember this fact when we see the baptismal font. Baptism occurs not because of who we are but because of Who God is. We remember it whenever we see the communion and remember the words of institution of that sacrament. It is the Risen Lord who invites us to the Table. It is the Risen Lord who invites the undeserving to partake of the meal provided.

It was by faith that Abraham responded to God's call; *'Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you. ... I will make you a blessing. (Genesis 12: 1-2, selected)*

God called you, called this congregation and called us to this time and place to be a blessing to the Nicodemuses of this world

Please join me in prayer. Lord, make each one of us a blessing in this world. Mold us together and make our life together a blessing throughout *all* of your creation.

Amen.