



*A Secret Conversation? Jesus Tells Nicodemus The Truth.*

*A Sermon on John 3:1-17*

*May 27th, 2018 ~ Trinity Sunday*

*First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

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Mrs. Mal was a demanding, but fair teacher. The type of teacher that made English fun. By the time 5th hour came along, I was ready for her class. I had a good friend in that class named Al. One day, Al wanted to tell me something while Mrs. Mal was teaching, so he cupped his mouth with his hands and whispered to me. Mrs. Mal saw what was going on and abruptly stopped her lesson. She looked directly at me and said “Secrets don’t make friends. Secrets only exclude people and make them feel left out. Why don’t you tell the class what you and Al were talking about?” I was stunned. I didn’t want that kind of attention and, worse than that, I hadn’t even heard what Al had whispered. I didn’t know what to say to Mrs. Mal and the Class. Certainly, no one else was going to pipe up with something to save me. I just sat there with a blank look on my face and nothing to say.

At some point in our lives we have told a secret. Maybe you told one this week. Or even this morning. At some point in our lives we’ve heard secrets, some big, some small. Secrets aren’t necessary bad, but like Mrs. Mal said “secrets don’t makes friends.” Secrets leave people out, making them feel excluded and alone.

As I read through John chapter three, I kept hearing Mrs. Mal’s words “Secrets don’t make friends” in my mind. Nicodemus had shown up to talk to Jesus in the middle of the night. The middle of the night is an odd time to have an appointment. Why would he do such a thing? Some scholars think it is because he was afraid to be seen with Jesus. The Pharisees wanted Jesus dead, and Nicodemus was one of them. If you were seen talking with Jesus you were considers his compatriot and, therefore, your life could be in jeopardy too. In many ways, Pharisees were thought to be the best people in the whole country, people above reproach. They couldn’t be seen with a subversive rebel rouser, like Jesus, without people raising their eyebrows in suspicion. The Pharisees were an elite group of people. In fact, at any given time there could only be up to 6,000 of them. They wanted limited numbers so that they would get the best of the best. Not only was Nicodemus as Pharisee. He was also a member of the inner circle that existed within the Pharisees. Nicodemus was part of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin were a seventy member court and they were the Supreme Court of the Jews. Nicodemus had good reasons not to be seen with Jesus. Under the darkness of night, Nicodemus went to see Jesus, which might sound like he was trying to keep a very big secret. We must, however, be careful not condemn him for this. The Bible has other examples of people who were afraid others would find out they knew Jesus (Peter). If we were in his position we’d probably do the same.

There might, however, be another reason why Nicodemus went to see Jesus in the middle of the night. Being a Pharisee and part of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus was well versed in the Holy Scriptures. It’s likely that he knew the entire Old Testament by heart and could recited the whole thing at the

drop of a hat. To do so takes time, discipline, and concentration. The Pharisees thought the best time to put your mind to memorization was in the middle of the night. In a room lit only by candle light there would be no distractions or interruptions. All of one's mental facilities could be given to studying the law. Maybe Nicodemus had the same thought about going to see Jesus. During the day people from all over would crowd around Jesus to hear him speak and to be healed. "It may well be that Nicodemus came to Jesus in the middle of the night because he wanted an absolutely private and undisturbed time with Jesus." (Barclays) If this is the reason why Nicodemus went to Jesus in the night, which I do think it is, then it would be wise for us to do the same. I'm not saying we pray only at midnight or read our Bible only at 3am. We pray without ceasing and read God's word continuously. What I am saying is, when we approach Jesus we intentionally get rid everything that might distract us. Whatever they may be. Doing so isn't an easy task. It takes time, discipline, and concentration. Monks and nuns have dedicated their lives to dwelling, undistracted, in the presences of Jesus, which is why they too pray, speaking to God and listening for God to speak, in the middle of the night. Nicodemus did it. The saints of the church have long done it. We too ought to do it too. When we do we will encounter the one who loves so deeply that he has saved the world, a truth that is so wonderful it has transformed and continue to transform our lives.

What Jesus boldly told Nicodemus, in the middle of the night, is no secret at all. Jesus told him the truth. A truth which is inclusive and welcoming. That truth lies at the heart of the Gospel. Jesus said to him "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have life enteral. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17) The truth in John three tells us exactly who Jesus is. Jesus is God's only son. It also tells us that Jesus, who won victory over death, graciously extends to us life everlasting, not because we have to earn our place before God, but because God calls us. In the middle of the night, with no distractions, Nicodemus learned the truth about Jesus, which is no secret.

Since we know this truth, that God gave his son to save the world, our responsibility is to share the Good News of Jesus. We don't whisper it to one another from time to time. We tell the Good News of the Gospel with boldness, sharing with everyone who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

In 9th grade I got in trouble because of a secret. Since then Mrs. Mal's words have suck in my mind "Secrets don't make friends." And they don't because secrets intentionally leave people out. Nicodemus sets and example for us, to come to God without distractions, but unlike Nicodemus late night travels, the gospel is no secret and is meant to be shared with everyone. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him should not perish but have life enteral. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:16-17) Knowing the truth of Jesus, which cannot be kept secret we proclaim the Good News of the Gospel boldly, just as Jesus did with Nicodemus.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.