**LENT REFLECTION 1**

**Nicodemus visits Jesus – John 3:1-17**

Now 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.

**Collect**

Almighty God,

by the prayer and discipline of Lent

may we enter into the mystery of Christ’s sufferings,

and by following in his Way

come to share in his glory;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Reflection**

This is surely one of the most famous passages of scripture and for many it is a source of real spiritual comfort and strength.

It is set within the context of a leading Jewish Pharisee (someone who took the details of the religious law very seriously) visiting Jesus at night. Nicodemus, though a leading lawyer, is struggling to understand the significance of Jesus. He sees God is with Jesus – but what might this mean? John uses the plural “you” and “we” to explain the transition from the old order into the new (like new wine in new wineskins). He explains that the physical world is divided from the spiritual world – the water and the spirit (v3, 5-6). Jesus is of the spirit (he’s come from heaven v13) and those of the world cannot see or understand this (v11-12). This explains the darkness in which Nicodemus approaches Jesus. He uses the central Old Testament image of Moses’ staff which turned into a snake as a symbol of healing to explain the cross. As people around Moses could touch the staff to be healed physically so we can now believe in Christ on the cross to be healed spiritually for God has no wish to condemn the world but to save it and He does so through Christ’s life and death. This means that all those who believe, who “see”, will inherit eternal life.

Rather wonderfully we see Nicodemus again at the end of the gospel as he gives Christ his family tomb for his burial – an intimate and touching way to express how this pharisee had been impressed by Christ.

Various things might strike us about this passage.

The first is to what extent we see the life of the world and the life of the spirit as inherently divided and separate. This is a Greek idea and one John was very keen on. But we live in the “real world” and value much of it and our faith can enrich our real everyday lives. Yet equally we often seek sanctuary – a place of holiness set apart from everyday life. Christ here is the link – in Christ heaven touches earth, and earth heaven (v13). The spirit and the world connect.

The second is the courteous conversation the two have. Religious differences frequently bring division, but here there is mutual listening and understanding. Nicodemus explores his faith, he doesn’t simply desire to rebuke what he doesn’t understand. Christ’s words might have caused offence, yet they don’t seem to. Maybe it is in the motive behind our speaking which communicates most and in this passage the desire seems to be not rebuke but encouragement and grace.

The third is that it is a symbol of danger and death which heals us - Moses with the snake (to this day a symbol of the General Medical Council), and Christ on the cross, the symbol of God’s reconciling and healing grace. All medicine is a form of poison but a poison which removes that which harms us. This is a radical and interesting way of interpreting our faith – it is facing what harms us which can heal us. This passage encourages us to believe – to trust – in the God made known in Christ for it reveals a character of goodness, sacrifice and compassion.

Lastly Nicodemus appears later in the gospel giving Christ a place in his family tomb. What a touching mark of affection and respect. Perhaps we too have been on a journey of faith and perhaps we too are not sure where that journey might end. Sometimes “living with the questions” seems what we’re asked to do.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS**

What is the most important aspect of your faith for you and how does it affect your everyday life?

In what ways can we disagree well with others whose opinions we don’t agree with?

Have you had an experience of being healed of something? How has this changed you or your faith?

Can you describe your journey of faith? Do you feel that you’ve finished this journey or can you notice that your faith is changing?

How might this passage of Scripture help prepare you for Easter?

*Noël*