

A Homily by Ericca Cavender-Caldwell

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Trinity Sunday

There are 1,967 different individuals named in our Holy Bible. If we were to include people, places, nations, and deities that number would go up to 3,397. So, perhaps it is not a shock that sometimes a few historical figures occasionally get overlooked. Nicodemus, for example! His story is intertwined with the very verse of scripture that many consider to be the summation of our entire Christian faith.

“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.”

Good Ole John 3:16. We have all seen it monogrammed boldly on T-shirts, bookmarks, bumper stickers, billboards across the great state of Mississippi and my personal favorite 40 oz stainless steel tumblers guaranteed to keep my iced coffee cold for 24 hours or more. But why? Why Nicodemus? Why in all of the beautiful and divinely hopeful encounters in the Gospel do we also read about the rabbi that couldn't get off the fence?

Perhaps, God so loved the world that he gave his Son not just in death but in his life. Good teachers are teachers who can meet students where they are and change the communication styles between respective learners. Jesus was and is a teacher. He allowed Nicodemus the space to question and process completely foreign concepts without judgement and at his own pace. Jesus loved Nicodemus in the way he needed to be loved.

The results of Nicodemus's masterclass with Jesus are not known to us yet. I have faith that one day, I will get to find out. In fact, the last mention of Nicodemus is after the crucifixion of Jesus where he assists in the burial of Christ's body (John 19:39-42). We have no knowledge if in his final days he became a true disciple of Christ, or if he carried his born Jewish faith into death. What we do know is that Nicodemus came to respect and admire the Son of God so much that instead of celebrating what would seem to be a victory with his Pharisees brethren, he chose to mourn with the grieving. A truly radical act of love that one might say was "Christ-like."

So, why Nicodemus? Simply, we needed to be taught how God loves us. So that we may love others as he loved us. Jesus created a foundation with Nicodemus of love, kindness, and the allowance of time for personal prayer and introspection. If it is our goal to be effective ministers for God, surely taking the time to reflect and pray on how we are loving our neighbors is an effective use of our time. Are we building foundations for people to meet and forge relationships with God in the way God intended? Even if that looks different from our own relationship.

If we all were to take the time to reflect even further on our own relationships with the divine and how to define that, not one of them would agree with the other. How very Episcopalian of us. Moreover, how human! Jesus loved Nicodemus through his seemingly endless internal turmoil and questioning. As we encounter those that are seeking an understanding of God or more importantly healing from wounds that we may never know the root cause of, we

must remember to lead with love in our hands and faith in our hearts that God has already made right the wrongs of the world. That all God's children, no matter the sin can be born of the spirit.

The Episcopal Diocese of Ohio refers to our collective church as a "denomination of ministers, caring for the people God Loves." If we are to love all of God's children, then surely, we need to learn to love in the manner that Jesus did. Meet people where they are at. Yes, some people will feel God's presence by having long theological conversations and to be invited to service every Sunday, without fail. For others it's the offer of a cup of tea and the reminder they are simply never alone. For some its 2-inch plastic figurine that reminds you that everybody needs a little Jesus.