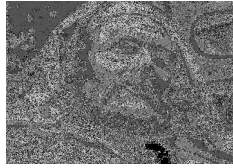


## SO WHATEVER HAPPENED TO NICODEMUS?



### WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MAN WHO WAS BORN AGAIN?

***"LIFE BEGINS AT THE END OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE." – NEAL DONALD WALSH***

*Scripture:*

**John 7:45-52**

45. The officers then went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?"
46. The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this man!"
47. The Pharisees answered them, "Are you led astray, you also?"
48. Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?
49. But this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed."
50. Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them,
51. "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?"
52. They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee."

**John 19:38-42**

38. After this Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave. So he came and took away his body.
39. Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight.
40. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.
41. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid.
42. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.



***"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone." – Neal Donald Walsh***

***If you remain in your comfort zone you will not go any further. – Catherine Pulsifer***

### **NICODEMUS**

The picture on the cover of the bulletin is actor Sir Lawrence Olivier as he was portraying Nicodemus in a motion picture about the life of Jesus. Nicodemus was the Pharisee who felt that the way to serve the Lord was to interpret the Laws of Moses. To this Jesus said, "You must be born again." And three verses later

Jesus says to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have abundant/eternal life." (John 3:16) The hardest questions often generate the best answers.

Nicodemus had no idea what “*born from above*” meant, and it was probably part of a larger conversation with Jesus. But these are the highlights leading up to Jesus saying that you must discover the spiritual part of your life, which is as important as the day you were born. Your salvation depends upon you, not upon the law, not your family, and not by your station in life. The great spiritual question Jesus asks of disciples, then and now, is: “What did you do for love and justice in the world in the name of your faith?”

So that was our lesson last week. After worship someone asked me, “So whatever happened to Nicodemus? Did he ever understand? You didn't finish the story. Do you know what happened to him after that?”

Yes, I do know what happened after that, and when I tell you “the rest of the story,” I think you will find it an even stronger lesson than the beginning – which was pretty good.

## **THE GOSPEL MENTIONS NICODEMUS IN TWO MORE PLACES.**

### **1. AT THE TRIAL**

At the Passover celebration in Jerusalem, during what we now call Holy Week, the Pharisees ordered the temple officers to arrest Jesus.

**Nicodemus was the sole Pharisee who spoke up in defense of Jesus' civil rights. Here's the scripture: "Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, 'Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?'" John 7:51**

Nicodemus urged his fellow Pharisees to listen to what Jesus had to say before they condemned Him. The Pharisees rejected his advice.

But Nicodemus' statement is now part of a fundamental of freedom in America. This will not be new to any of us. Tell me if this sounds familiar.

## **SIXTH AMENDMENT**

“In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district where in the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense.” (The Sixth Amendment, U.S. Constitution.)

Nicodemus was onto something important. Jesus got none of the benefits of Roman law, and none of the benefits to which people are entitled in our own country and free countries around the world.

- A Speedy trial. (Delay shall not be used as punishment.) He certainly got that.
- A public trial. (A closed trial is the exception where there are special circumstances, but it is not the rule.)
- An impartial jury. In our country, that is twelve people. In Athens it was five-hundred. They do not have vested interests, and the trial must be fair.
- There must be a notice of accusation – an indictment that is precise and related to specific statutes that define the offence and the punishment if guilty.
- Confrontation. (The right to cross-examine witnesses, and the atmosphere in which hearsay is not equal to evidence and first person witness. Defendants are also permitted to call witnesses in their own favor.)
- The right to counsel. (The right to have someone familiar with the law to advise a defendant and speak on his/her behalf.)

Freedom with justice is fundamental in our

country. And lynch mobs, vigilantes, militias, and people who bear false witness are as criminal as those whom they accuse.

## **2. AT THE TOMB**

There is one more reference to Nicodemus. It comes from the events of Good Friday, after Jesus had been crucified. As a crucified criminal in the eyes of the Law, what kind of burial do you suppose Jesus of Nazareth would normally have received? His body would probably have been thrown into a common grave set apart for criminals. There would be no religious services. It would be risky to ask for the body of a crucified criminal and questions would be asked of those claiming the body. Permission would have to be granted by the proper authorities, and just asking could be dangerous.

But the scriptures say that two influential Jewish leaders were willing to take that risk. One of these men was the wealthy and honorable Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph had not agreed with the other religious leaders to put Jesus to death. After Jesus died on the cross, Joseph courageously approached Governor Pilate and begged that Jesus' body be given to him. Pilate granted his request.

Another important man was with Joseph. Together they took one hundred pounds of perfumes and spices to the crypt to anoint Jesus' body for burial. They put Jesus' body on a table, and wrapped his body in a linen shroud, folding the spices into the linen folds.

### **IT WAS NICODEMUS**

This burial was a sacred ritual, and this final act of respect was both honorable and defiant. Joseph of Arimathea was the man best known for this final act of faith. And the other man was Nicodemus. Are you surprised? Are you touched?

This Good Friday story about Nicodemus reveals that Nicodemus may have become one of the first disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "You must be born from above." And so Nicodemus was.

When life gets difficult, there are some who flee, and there are some who step up. Which was Nicodemus?

## **COMFORT ZONES**

Each of us has a comfort zone that surrounds us, and that we enjoy living in. When was the last time you stepped out of yours?

When we are in our comfort zone, we know we cannot fail. We surround ourselves with busywork, and walls that are not unlike a jail cell.

***"If you remain in your comfort zone you will not go any further." – Catherine Pulsifer***

***"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone." – Neal Donald Walsh***

But then we test ourselves with something we haven't done before, or something we haven't done in a long time, and we are not sure if we can do it again. We discover that life begins at the edge of our comfort.

## **A POEM**

**I couldn't let my life go by just watching others win.**

**I held my breath; I stepped outside and let the change begin.**

**I took a step and with new strength I'd never felt before,**

**I kissed my comfort zone goodbye and closed and locked the door.**

**If you're in a comfort zone, afraid to venture out,**

**Remember that all winners were at one time filled with doubt.**

**A step or two and words of praise can make your dreams come true.**

**Reach for your future with a smile; success is there for you.**

- *Define the things that inspire you.*
- *Stay positive.*
- *“If you don’t like something change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude. Don’t complain.” –Maya Angelou*
- *Develop an action plan.*
- *Express gratitude for what you have.*
- *Find enthusiasm for something every day.*

**I ENDORSE THIS MESSAGE**

I'm ready to turn off the attack advertisements on television.

I'm ready to stop thinking I am a good person because people in other countries are so bad.

I'm ready to endorse my own message, and the things that make life meaningful and positive for me.

And as long as I can, I want to be as brave as Nicodemus who was born again late in his life.

*“A step or two and words of praise can make your dreams come true.*

*“Reach for your future with a smile; success is there for you.”*

**“I'm John Cushman, and I'm not running for office, but I hope I can continue to grow and become more Christ-like.**

**“And I endorse this message.”**

(Campaign Reform Act, language, 2002)



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