



## The Nourishing Vocation Project Engaging the Living Word

[John 3:1-21](#)

### What is this particular text?

- Story
  - Nicodemus goes to see Jesus
  - Secrecy – the meeting happens at night
  - Openness
    - What is God up to in Jesus?
    - How can this be?
- Theological conversation
  - Nicodemus asks
  - Jesus answers
- Portrayal of the Trinity
  - Not a theological treatise
  - Named in Jesus' responses to Nicodemus
    - God
    - Spirit
    - Son
- Symbolism
  - Light/Dark
  - Water
  - Pole lifted up
- Origin/(re)birth story
- Theology
  - Soteriology – not perish
  - Pneumatology – the Spirit blows where it will
  - Cosmology – God loves the world
  - Eschatology – not to condemn the world
  - Theological anthropology – born from above

### How does the text function within the scriptural story?

- In the Gospel of John it contrasts with the story that follows (the woman at the well)
  - Night/mid-day
  - Learned, named man/anonymous woman
  - Unresolved questions/New identity and purpose
- Hones in on God's worldview
- Portrays Jesus as the new Moses
- Probes the fullness of the Godhead
  - Born of the Spirit (v. 6)
  - Son of Man/Son of Man (v. 14, 17, 18)
  - God (vs. 3, 5, 17, 16, 21)

### How can this text function in the church today?

- Gospel in a nutshell
  - Don't forget vs. 17 (God did not send the Son into the world to condemn)
- Reminder of the church's call to
  - Engage people's questions
  - Proclaim Christ
  - Be centered in love and mercy, not condemnation or judgment
- Move from theology to practice
- Embody an attitude of curiosity
- Embody a posture of openness

### What does the text do to you? How do you react to the text? What feelings does this text engender in you?

- Draws me into the story
- Makes me feel for and with Nicodemus
- I can understand Nicodemus' confusion
- Makes me curious
- Gives me permission in my own wonderments

### What do you have to say to the text?

- Nicodemus' questions are fair and reasonable
- Jesus' responses are confusing – even for someone who “knows” them
- Openness can lead to more confusion
- Metaphorical speak can be both helpful and challenging

### What do you see through this text from the story itself?

- Someone seeking answers
- Someone who wants to know more
- God's “so that”
- Context matters
- What God is up to

### What do you see from within your church/community/world? (2023)

- The church's present-day confusion and questions
  - The church has a tendency to privatize faith
  - The life of faith is public because *God loves the world*
- “God loves the world” has real world implications for church and society
- Opportunity for the church to be open to God's “so that” in new and powerful ways
- To be born from above/again has present-tense, embodied implications that are personal *but not private*
  - The “other side” of baptism looks different – in practice
  - The “other side” of baptism is where the life of faith is lived
- Crises of our current time
  - Migrants and refugees – [103 million forcibly displaced people worldwide](#)
  - Planet in crisis
  - Christian nationalism
  - Questions of meaning and purpose

**What do you see within yourself?**

- My own questions of faith
- My own reticence to “where the wind” might be blowing
- My own sense of “openness” might make me unable to recognize my own inability to understand

**What is the context – textual and historical?**

- Follows the call of Philip and Nathanael
- Follows Jesus’ first miracle at Cana
- Follows Jesus’ cleansing the temple
- Precedes reference to Jesus baptizing
- Precedes questions and answers with John about Jesus
- Precedes the story of Jesus and the Woman of Samaria at the well
- Continues light and dark dichotomy

**What questions does this text raise for you?**

- What does the “by night” mean? [John 3:2](#)
- Who is the “we” that Nicodemus references? [John 3:2](#)
- Why did Nicodemus seek out Jesus?
- Did Nicodemus leave satisfied or unsatisfied?
- How would Nicodemus tell this story?
- What questions do I have for Jesus?
- Do I bring my questions to Jesus in the light of day or the dark of night?
  - When do I go to Jesus “by night,” and why?
- Am I open to hear what Jesus has to say?
  - What hinders my openness?
  - What do I need to be more open?
- Where/how am I being called to greater openness by Jesus?
- How does my baptismal origin story impact my daily life?

**What words/themes seem of particular import?**

- By night
- Born from above
- How can this be?
- God, Spirit, Son of Man
- Loved
- The world
- Not condemn

**What is the Gospel / transforming Good News within this text?**

- God meets us in our wonderment
- God meets us in our confusion
- God can handle our questions
- God does open our eyes and hearts
- God meets us in the night

- Rebirth is real
- The Spirit is at work
- God's love knows no bounds
- To be born from above is a new origin story
- Salvation is present-tense
- Eternal life is not only for the future

#### **What is the as-over-againstness of this text?**

- The life of faith is a life of questions
- Sometimes Jesus' words are confusing
- We often don't want others to know our struggles in the faith
- Privatizing our faith can seem easier than publicly living our faith
- Openness can be hard
- Openness can lead to confusion
- Openness can grow out of confusion
- We don't always get clarity to all of our questions of Jesus

#### **Who does this text say that Jesus is, or if not Jesus, then who does this text say that God is? What does this text say about God?**

- Jesus meets us in our wondering
- Jesus can handle our questions
- Jesus meets us in our questions
- Jesus is the one lifted up
  - On the cross
  - From the grave
  - In the ascension
- Jesus is the one given by God out of love for the world
- Jesus does not condemn

#### **What have others said about this text?**

- ["God loves the world."](#) That's the whole world. And while that world was pretty big in John's day—including Roman soldiers, "sinners," pagans, Pharisees, people who went to the temple regularly and those who weren't allowed in the temple, lepers and other "unclean" folk—today our world is even bigger. Today we can turn on the television or listen to the radio or read the newspaper and find stories—with real people in them—from all over God's world. And when we're really lucky, we either get to travel and meet some of those people, or we find they come closer to us." Melissa Bane Sevier, "Contemplative Viewfinder," minister, freelance writer, and photographer
- ["Nicodemus, a man who traces the lines of order"](#) carefully, is terrified of the wind that blows where it will, the wind whose origin is in the Unknowable One. And so am I terrified, for like Nicodemus, my roots have always been in this tradition of American democracy, this tradition of considered process, debated truth, measured steps. What Jesus is urging is outside all the boundaries I understand." Nancy Rockwell, "The Bite in the Apple," lives and writes in Exeter, New Hampshire. She has earned three degrees, in literature at Brown and theology at Harvard, has studied liturgy at Canterbury Cathedral, liberation theology in Nicaragua and Mexico, Spanish in Guatemala, Spiritual Direction at Shalem, and Celtic Christianity and paganism in Scotland and Ireland.

- [“This well-known passage](#) from John is a rarity in the Gospels because it shows Jesus discussing in some detail all three persons of the Trinity. Jesus’ words here should not be mistaken for a theological treatise on the one God in three persons, however. Instead, in this encounter Jesus challenges Nicodemus to move from theory to practice, from knowledge to faith, from curiosity to commitment.” Judith Jones, Vicar, St. Stephen & St. Luke by the Sea Episcopal Churches, Waldport, Ore., United States

#### **What will I teach or proclaim?**

- We/you are called to be open
- Openness is challenging
- Openness is confusing
- Jesus meets us in our nighttime questions
- The Spirit does indeed blow/move/open our hearts
- Claimed and named in baptism we
  - Are born anew
  - Birthed into a new way of being and doing
  - Free to be open to that which scares us
  - Free to wonder
  - Free to ask
  - Free to not understand
- In all places, all times, and all circumstances, the Spirit blows where it will
- God *so loved* the world – even you
- God does not condemn you
- God’s “so that” is for you!