

Lent 2 A 2011

Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm 121

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

John 3:1-17

The wind blows where it wants to.

The wind blows where it wants to,  
And at the moment,  
It's coming from Japan.

Now, of course that's not literally true,  
Right here, right now,  
any more than it's really true  
That the wind blows where it wants to  
Rather than following the laws of physics.

I'm pretty sure  
That even in the time of Jesus  
People had some idea why the wind works the way it does.  
But that doesn't mean  
That we who know a lot more about how it works  
don't still experience it as a mystery.

The wind is invisible,  
Seen only in its effect.  
We can hear it  
We can feel it.  
We think we can understand it.

And yet, we still experience it as a mystery.

The wind blows where it wants to,  
And it's blowing from Japan.

It's not bringing us radioactive contamination,  
As far as we know.

But as the world's wind blows in our direction,  
It brings with it shock,  
And sadness –  
And fear.

Somehow this seems worse

Than other disasters,  
More frightening,  
More threatening.

Perhaps it's the threat of nuclear disaster.  
Perhaps it's something more complex.

But the wind coming from Japan  
Brings a message:  
We have so much to lose,  
And we could be losing it.

If things can fall apart  
In orderly, ancient Japan,  
That has survived so much,  
Then the world is not safe.

I can think of a lot of gospel passages  
That would promise us good news  
On a morning like this one.  
Lots of messages of comfort and joy  
That would make us know  
That the ground is firm under our feet.

Instead, we get Nicodemus.

Now, don't get me wrong.  
I love this story.  
I always have.

I've always loved this story.  
It speaks to my mind.  
For me it's always seemed to be a story  
to contemplate at leisure,  
In an ivory tower.

It teases out the great questions  
Of human existence,  
Questions of meaning and identity,  
And gives us lots to talk about.

But does it speak to our fears?  
Does it speak to our longing for safety?  
Does it shine a light on a disaster  
That keeps on growing  
And changing

And spinning out of control?

Can this story speak to us now,  
We, who have to hold on so tight  
To keep our worlds in order,  
We, who have so much to lose,  
And fear we may be losing it?

Can Nicodemus,  
And his life-changing encounter  
With Jesus,  
Can he offer us something  
To sustain us  
As we face shock,  
And sadness, and fear?

Perhaps, if we take his journey with him,  
We will find out.

So, on this bright morning,  
Imagine it is night,  
Night in a dark city.

Imagine you,  
Like Nicodemus,  
Go cautiously,  
Drawn towards the mysterious teacher  
Who speaks in words you cannot understand,  
And cannot forget.

His words are like the wind,  
They can't be caught or held,  
But they are strong enough to bend you.

Nicodemus came with careful questions,  
Ready for reasoning,  
Open to enlightenment,  
Interested in the new teacher.

But Nicodemus had much to lose,  
So he played it safe.

Not completely safe.  
He did go out by night.  
He did ask questions.

But it seems to me now,  
That he only asked questions  
When he thought he already know the answer.  
Good strategy.  
But he got fooled.  
When he asked that first question  
That isn't a question,  
He found himself looking  
Into a whole new world.

Because Jesus  
Doesn't usually answer  
The questions we ask.  
He answers the questions we don't ask,  
The ones we didn't know to ask,  
Or were afraid to ask.

And it's up to us  
Either to catch the wind of his Spirit  
As it blows past,  
And follow where he leads,  
Or to sit there  
Scratching our heads with Nicodemus.  
What do you mean?  
How can these things be?

Try not to be too quick  
To condemn Nicodemus.  
Have you never played it safe?

We're like Nicodemus:  
We play it safe  
Even though we know we are not safe.  
For us there's a whole world of things  
To be lost,  
And we can't stop it from happening:  
We don't live on a fault line or near the ocean  
Or too close downwind of a nuclear reactor,  
But we have seen the pictures,  
and we know that one way or another,  
We could lose it all.

We could lose everything.  
The lives of the people we love.  
The love of those who mean the world to us.  
The respect of those around us.

We might even lose the illusion  
That the world is still under our control.  
We have everything to lose.

Except one thing.  
We can't lose the only thing that matters.

Be Nicodemus again  
For a moment.  
Ponder your questions.  
Why is there something,  
Rather than nothing at all?  
Why is there light,  
When there could be only darkness?  
Why are we able to love at all?  
Why do we have hope,  
When we do?

Think about the teacher  
You've heard speaking in riddles.  
They say water turns to wine  
When he is near.

Get up,  
And walk through the empty streets by night  
To the place you've heard he's staying.  
Knock at the door.

The door opens.  
A little path of light  
Streams out.  
The teacher is standing there.

Nothing goes as you had planned.  
A whole new world opens up,  
And you have to choose,  
Do I want to live in that whole new world,  
A world so new and different  
It's as if I'd been born  
All over again?

Who would choose that?  
Certainly not someone  
With everything to lose,  
Certainly not someone who wants,  
who needs to hold on

and keep it all together.

And that's you and me.

Except.

Except that it doesn't seem to be holding together very well.

The earth is shaking and the seas are rising

And our infrastructure is breaking down

And nothing seems certain.

We have everything to lose,

And we may be losing it,

So perhaps waking up to a whole new world,

Seeing things in such a different light

That it's as if we'd been born all over again,

Perhaps it's something to think about.

In the end,

We might come to understand

We've got nothing to lose after all.

The only thing worth having

Is the only thing that

can't ever be taken away.

Earthquakes may shake us to pieces,

And there will still be love.

Waves may break over our heads,

And we will still know that love

Wants to live in us and among us.

God is,

God loves us,

God comes to live with us,

And that counts for everything.

We have nothing to lose

That can be lost.

That's a whole new way of looking at the world,

So new it's as if it were a different world altogether.

So new it's as if we are seeing it with newborn eyes.

Jesus says no one can enter the kingdom

Without doing this.

But if we do,

If, like Nicodemus,  
We finally get it,  
Then the kingdom is everywhere,  
Even in the molten heart  
Of a nuclear reactor,  
Even among the people fleeing in fear,  
Even among us,  
Waiting for the wind to blow our way.

The wind is a mystery.  
It could bring fear and sadness.

Or it could be the beginning  
Of a whole new world.

The good news is this –  
We don't make the wind blow.  
It blows where it chooses.

But we can choose  
To go where it takes us.