

The Still Point
A Time of Meditation and Reflection
The Second Sunday in Lent

... At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance...

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

Like a tent in the wilderness, God's table stands ready;

A place of sanctuary and safety, of hospitality and healing.

Come, all you who are tired and travel-stained, footsore and famished;

Come with your fellow travelers to find companionship and comfort.

Jesus waits to meet us here and welcome us in,

Offering rest and renewal, solace, and strength, for the journey still to come.

Opening Prayer

Lord, help us to see: to see what is eternally good and true, and having seen, to go on searching until we come to the joys of heaven. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Gospel

John 3:1-17

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.”

Poem: “Wind”

by Florida Watts Smyth (b.

What does wind stir in me
That stirs not in the tree?
It stirs a farther hope.
Trees stand, but I shall run
Beyond that slope,
Beyond the sun,
And see,
Wind-swept, the spaces of eternity.

Meditation

The “story” of Nicodemus is really the first of the discourses of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel with a brief narrative introduction. It was since the earliest days of the church, and it remains, one of the gospel passages that serve as a foundation for formal Christian theology. It contains, scholars claim, essential elements that help answer basic questions: how does God enter the world? Who is Jesus? What is the nature of divine love? The key phrase, “God so loved the world that he gave the only Son” is for many the most important verse in the entire Bible.

And yet, beyond its theological importance, this passage has a more personal resonance for many. Rather than inviting formal theological questions, it might lead seekers into deep personal reflection. Since at least the fourth century this passage has taken its place with three other narratives from John’s gospel – the woman at the well, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus – as the stories that lead those preparing for baptism into life-changing encounter with Jesus. The ancient and always new process of faith formation called the catechumenate reaches its final phase when we enter into these stories and make them our own.

The essential symbols of these four stories – wind, water, light, and life itself – are archetypes that lead us beyond ourselves into a world that is bigger, more life-giving, more mysterious, and more challenging than what we might have imagined before we met Jesus. Two moments in the Nicodemus story, his coming “by night” and Jesus’ gnomic utterance, expressed in the King James Version as “the wind bloweth where it listeth,” hint at this mystery and promise.

The poem offers a brief glimpse at how the symbol, the archetype of the Nicodemus passage – wind – can carry us beyond ourselves, “over the hills and far away” into the “spaces of eternity” that we cannot yet imagine, but long for all the same.

Questions for Reflection

Have you had an experience of wind that has led you into wondering, or exhilaration, or fear? If you revisit that experience now, what might it show you?

Have you had a time when you felt as though your life had been given back to you, that it was all new? If you have not, do you know of someone else who has had an experience of this sort?

Is “John 3:16” as a shorthand for “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” a positive phrase for you? If so, why? If not, why not?

You might want to spend some time with this sketch by the African American painter Henry Ossawa Tanner, a study for the painting “Jesus and Nicodemus on a Rooftop.”

Prayers

We bring before God someone whom we have met or remembered today

We bring to God someone who is hurting tonight and needs our prayer

We bring to God a troubled situation in our world

We bring to God, silently, someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God that we might grow in generosity of spirit, clarity of mind, and warmth of affection

We offer our thanks to God for the blessings in our lives

We name before God those who have died.

Gracious God, you hear all our prayers: those we speak aloud, those we hold in our hearts, and those prayers for which we have no words. Hear the prayers of your people, and grant them as may be best for us, for the sake of your holy name. **Amen.**

Accept our thanks for all you have done, O God. Our hands were empty, and you filled them.

May Christ’s holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with us every step of the way, and be our guide as our road changes and turns, and the blessing of God our Creator, Redeemer and Giver of life be among us now and remain with us forever. **Amen.**

Reflections this month offered by: Rev’d Elizabeth Randall