

Holy Trinity
For Group Meetings from May 19th – May 25th

OUR MISSION: As a missional congregation we *celebrate* Christ's presence, *invite* people into a growing relationship with Jesus, and *equip* them to *serve* in a broken world.

Prayer of the Day: Almighty Creator and ever-living God: we worship your glory, eternal Three-in-One, and we praise your power, majestic One-in-Three. Keep us steadfast in this faith, defend us in all adversity, and bring us at last into your presence, where you live in endless joy and love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING TOGETHER

Share: How did last week's scripture (Acts 2:1-21) work in your life this week?

Mission:

- What was most satisfying about your ministry last week?
- Where do you see God at work?
- How did you participate in God's missional activity?
- How did inviting go last Sunday?

Hear: John 3:1-17

Explore Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Why did Nicodemus find Jesus words so difficult to believe?
2. Verse 14 looks back to the incident described in Numbers 21:5-8. What is Jesus compared to in that story?
3. What is Jesus identity and purpose according to verses 16 and 17?

Connect Questions: (Use these or develop your own.)

1. Describe a time when you felt like you needed a fresh start.
2. What does it mean to you to identify as a Christian?
3. Who helps you when you struggle? What do they do that is particularly helpful?

Memorize this verse: "Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?'" (John 3:9) When have you echoed these words recently?

BIBLICAL EQUIPPING APART:

Obey: During this week follow through on your intentions.

Meditate: Meditate on Psalm 29. How does this speak into your life?

Reflect: What have I learned in my week of living with this text? What can I share with my group when we next meet?

Notes for ChristCare leaders:

In addition to containing the world's most famous Bible verse (not to mention the following verse which, again in my humble opinion, is just as important!), the story of Nicodemus offers a picture of a man who is curious about Jesus, who maybe even wants to believe, but struggles. At least, he struggles once he actually gets to talk with Jesus. Notice that he comes with a clear affirmation of Jesus' connection to God. In response, Jesus immediately jumps to a huge assertion about being born again/afew/from above. And that's when Nicodemus curiosity turns to struggle. This is a fairly common technique in John, as the confusion or misunderstanding of Jesus' dialogue partner gives Jesus a chance to elaborate. So, after Nicodemus' initial confusion stemming from taking Jesus' words literally, the only other thing Nicodemus says is, "how can this be?" Which gives Jesus a good excuse to talk some more.

But what strikes me this week is that Nicodemus is one of the few side characters (not one of the disciples) that appears at several points in John's Gospel. Here, in his main appearance. Again near the end of chapter 7, when Nicodemus, if not exactly standing up for Jesus let alone proclaiming his faith in him, nevertheless reminds his colleagues that, according to the law, they should not judge Jesus before giving him a trial. And for offering that reminder he is rebuked (7:45-52). Then he makes a third appearance, this time after Jesus' crucifixion, when Nicodemus accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to collect, anoint, and bury the body of Jesus, the one just executed by the Romans (19:38-42). Again, perhaps not quite the same as standing up in the assembly and declaring his faith, yet nevertheless another significant step forward, as by his actions Nicodemus declares this allegiance to the one who had just been executed for a capitol offense.

And that's what makes Nicodemus such an interesting character. He is the only side character, as far as I can tell, who shows up at multiple points in John's Gospel and grows in his faith. At first he brings questions and is confused. He later invites others to slow their judgment. He finally risks publically honoring the one just executed. Faith, at least in Nicodemus' case, takes time. Indeed, his journey with Jesus continues across most of the Gospel of John and, we might assume, beyond. And that's good news for us. Perhaps coming to faith was easy and fast and strong and you've rarely doubted. And all any of us can do is give thanks for that experience. But for others (maybe most of us) faith comes more in fits and starts, two steps forward and another back. Or perhaps at times things seems clear and at others just plain confusing. Or maybe faith feels a lot more like an endless series of questions rather than easy and forthright affirmations. For those like that (and I count myself among that crowd) hearing Nicodemus' story once again might be particularly meaningful.

I've read somewhere (I can't remember where) that Nicodemus is the patron saint of curiosity. I love that. I think I'd also claim him as the patron saint of all those of us with an uneasy or restless faith. Those who aren't satisfied with easy answers, those who keep questioning, those who want to believe and also understand, but at least to believe even when we don't understand! Even more though, I think this story says a lot not simply about Nicodemus about also about God. God is patient. God doesn't give up. If God keeps working in and on and through Nicodemus across three years and sixteen chapters in John's Gospel, God will keep working in and on and through us. No matter how long it takes.

Thanks be to God,

Pastor Thadd (tbook@desertcross.org)

Traditional version:

Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us
from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power,
And the glory, forever and ever. Amen

Contemporary version:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those
Who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the
power, and the glory are yours,
Now and forever. Amen