

So who was Nicodemus? He was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews and almost certainly a member of the Sanhedrin – the highest court of justice and the supreme council in ancient Jerusalem.

He comes to Jesus at night probably so he will not be seen by those who know him – he is after all a man of significant reputation and Jesus is a newcomer and this meeting happens just after Jesus had created a bit of a scene in the temple making a whip and throwing out those who had turned it into a market place.

He opens his conversation with Jesus with the phrase “we know” but clearly from what he says he didn’t! He believed that God’s plan of salvation revolved around adherence to Torah law and he would have considered himself very good at this – so surely his entry into the kingdom of God was assured! But Jesus puts him straight and makes it clear that to do this he must be “born again.”

The phrase being ‘born again’ really used to trouble me – in fact I don’t think it was until we were at Spring Harvest just after Easter this year a light came on and I felt I really understood and took on board what it meant. We attended teaching sessions on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. And I really would recommend you all to read it – it’s only 6 short chapters.

In this letter he explains that by knowing Jesus we are reborn into a family, we are all together as brothers and sisters and like any family this can be challenging as we are all individuals.

But we must remember that we are all loved equally by God and there should be harmony, forgiveness, mutual service, love and all of us should be unified as one people without any segregations as we all belong to one body. A phrase we weekly repeat in our liturgy.

We are all saved – we are all rescued – we are all forgiven - on an equal footing, no one of us can boast there’s a difference between us – we are all God’s handiwork and by accepting this we are all therefore reborn.

Living humbly, gently, patiently and bearing with one another is our grateful response to the grace of God. We put aside our old ways and we are made new – we are reborn – we begin again. We are allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us and make us more like Jesus - renewed in our minds and in our attitudes of mind. However we have to “make every effort” to live this way as we’re all human and frequently slip up, but all we have to do is repent (and this word in Greek simply means to turn around) and carry on again.

We are all a work in progress and no-one is perfect. It’s not a done deal though. Being reborn requires work - and constant work - it is a daily process of renewal. And it’s a personal journey.

Now another thing that struck me from our reading - is the importance of understanding one another through compassion and patience. When Nicodemus challenges Jesus’ teachings, instead of responding harshly or showing anger towards him, he patiently explains why his teachings are true. This reminds us that

no two people will ever understand each other perfectly; however, it's important to take time to try and share our wisdom with others - without judgement or criticism.

Verse 16 of our reading is perhaps the most well-known one in the Bible and a particular favourite of a very close friend of mine - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". In this profound declaration, Jesus encourages us to believe in Him as our Lord and Saviour so that we shall receive everlasting life – a life free from fear, pain and sorrow!

And our final verse – sets out God's purpose – "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Let these two verses sink in - God's gift of unconditional love to us all – cost him the ultimate price – the precious life of his only Son. I've heard it described as God's extravagant love for us.

And what becomes of Nicodemus? We aren't told by John if he showed any signs of understanding what Jesus was telling him about being born again - however he does pop up again in Chapter 7 giving a hesitant defence of Jesus when he is brought in front of the Pharisees. And again in Chapter 19 when he accompanies Joseph of Arimathea and takes along a very expensive amount of spices for Jesus' burial. So we must assume from this that he did get the message.

And what about us? If we have sincerely sought to become right with God and have received Jesus as our Saviour, we can rest in knowing we have been born again. As Paul wrote in Romans 10 v 9, "If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Dear Lord

May we constantly remember that we are a work in progress.

That you love each of us unconditionally and each of us equally.

May we grow in the fruits of the spirit and truly share your love for us with one another secure in the knowledge that we are yours.

Amen

Carol Elsasser, 26 May 24