

Mar 14 10 Lent 4 John 3:1-21

COME TOUCH HIS ROBE:

OUT OF THE DARKNESS INTO THE LIGHT

No one likes a dark room, unless you're a photographer and developing pictures and then it is essential. Dark places can be pretty scary. I mean a REAL dark room where you can't see your hand in front of your face is scary and dangerous. People who work the third shift often have problems sleeping because even though they close their eyes the room is still light and for some it becomes difficult to get the proper rest one needs. Caves are dark and dreary. Carole and a friend toured a cave in Kentucky while we were there. It was an experience Carole has not forgotten. First of all you had to be careful where you stepped and follow the person in front of you. Second it was damp and cold. Third there came a time when they were deep in the cave that they put out the lights just to experience total darkness. And that was the scary part. I guess you could hear voices and that of the guide to keep you calm, but you could not see a thing. You could put your hand in front of you but not see it. Everyone was glad when the lights came back on again. When they came out of the darkness of the cave into the daylight it gave new meaning of being in the light of a new day.

Well this morning we are looking at another person who was touched by God. Oh, this one is a little different story because we never know the results of

his conversation with Jesus until some chapters later in the book of John. But for now, hear an old, old story that is the heart of the Good News found in the Gospel of John that every Christian knows by heart. It's the story of Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and the teacher of the Jews. Turn up our hearing aids, open our hearts, turn our minds toward God's voice as He tries to get our attention in understand this transforming story found in John **READ**

Yes it is a familiar story. You've heard a sermon or two about John 3:16. Most people know that Scripture, the one that is the heart of the Gospel because it tells of God's love for his people. It tells how much his Son loved his Father's people. And it tells us about a reconciliation that could only be had through the death of his Son. *"For God so loved the world that he gave us his Son so that whoever would believe in Him could have eternal life."* Simple enough message from God I would think. But not simple enough because there are other people still outside the kingdom of God. There are some who walk in darkness, rejecting the light of salvation.

Which brings us today's story. First you need to realize that Nicodemus was not only a member of the Pharisees he was THE teacher of the Law. The Pharisees were about legalism. They interpreted the Law of Moses. They made sure every 'T' was crossed every 'I' dotted. They made sure one followed the Law no matter what or else your walk with God was broken. Second of all we need to realize

Nicodemus was curious about Jesus. Who knows how many times he was present when his buddies searched Jesus' mind, or tried to trick him. Maybe when they came back from one of those encounters they discussed how Jesus knew more than they did. And if that were the case, well, this man must have a closer relationship with God than they thought. Maybe one of the older members remembered a young 12 year kid who had been left behind by his parents speaking to them answering their questions with great knowledge and asking questions they could not answer. They were bewildered when they heard that 12 year old boy tell his parents they should have known where to look for him. After all he was about his Father's business. Now perhaps one of them who remembered hears a resemblance to that young voice in this man called Jesus. This man didn't keep the Law as they did, he often broke it.

And that leads to the curiosity of Nicodemus. **He came to Jesus by night.** We always wonder about that. But we shouldn't. Think about it, how would it have looked if this leader of the Pharisees, THE TEACHER, as he is referred to in one translation, would be seen talking to Jesus...alone? That would not have flown with his fellow Pharisees. He needed to disguise himself so no one would recognize him, you know remove the robe of his 'office' look like an ordinary Jewish person on his way home or something like that. But that did not matter that night because Curious George needed to get to the truth. He needed to know what

and where Jesus got all that wisdom and power. Could he really be...you know...sent by God? Was he....could he be...you know a new prophet who could tell them things from God? Could he be...you know...more than that...could he be...could he allow himself to think it...could he be God's Son? Could he be in fact, the long awaited Messiah? Perhaps so many questions on his mind when he knocked at the door of the home where Jesus was staying. So Nicodemus comes in the darkness to seek help in understanding the things he had heard with his own ears, seen with his own eyes. It was time to know the truth.

You ever feel like that? Don't we want to know the truth? Lately in politics it has been a topsy-turpy world. Who do we believe? And Toyota owners want to know the truth about how dangerous driving their cars might be. As Tom Cruise yelled in one of his movies, "WHAT IS THE TRUTH?" To which Jack Nicholson screams back, "**YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH!**" I believe we want to know the truth because our future depends upon it.

Nicodemus wanted to know the truth. He wanted to know the truth so that he could follow the truth. And what we know is this... the truth will set you free.

If we are going to follow Jesus we need to know the truth. Is he the Messiah? Is he the Son of God sent to die for us? Did he actually die on the cross? Did he rise again as he said he would? These are some questions some are afraid to ask because they are afraid of the answers. They are afraid because if the answer is

positive then they are put in a situation that they have to make a decision. Do I believe? Or do I reject what has been said in Scripture? Do I believe what the Bible says about Jesus? Do I believe in heaven and hell? Do I believe the only way to heaven is through Jesus? Or do I reject all this? Do I believe Jesus when it says that “God so loved the world that he gave us his Son so that all who believe in Him can have eternal life?” Which means, those who don’t believe are lost? Don’t stop with that verse. No! You got to read on in John’s gospel because it says, *“God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world guilty, **but to save the world through him. People who believe in God’s Son are not judged guilty. Those who do not believe have already been judged guilty, because they have not believed in God’s one and only Son. They are judged by this fact: The Light has come into the world but they did not want light. They wanted darkness, because they were doing evil things. All who do evil hate the light and will not come to the light because it will show all the evil things they do.”*** Satan radiates darkness and evil that’s why he is often pictured in black. Jesus radiates light that shines brightly like it did on the Mount of Transfiguration because light reveals sin and God’s goodness and love.

When the woman lost one of her coins that were part of her inheritance she lit a lamp and got down on her hands and knees bringing the light close to the ground in order for her to find part of her inheritance. You know what happened?

After searching for. Who knows how long, the light revealed its presence and she picked up the coin and jumped up and down, did a little Jewish version of the Irish jig shouting with joy she had found it. In fact she was so joyous she threw a party for her friends to celebrate finding the lost coin. The light revealed its presence. Listen to what John records in the first chapter of his Gospel about Jesus. He doesn't start with his birth but he says this...*There was a man named John (the one who baptized Jesus) who was sent by God: he came to tell people the truth about the Light so that through him all people could hear about the Light and believe...He came to the world but his own people did not accept him. BUT to all who did accept him and believe in him he gave the right to become children of God.*"

Nicodemus came to hear the truth. And the truth is this. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. And all who believe in him will have everlasting life. Jesus put it this way for Nicodemus. He basically says he was born of earthly parents but in order to have any part in the kingdom of God he needed a rebirth. Not one from earthly parents because, well they lived on this earth. He needed a rebirth from above, from God himself, through his only begotten Son. If he had come seeking the truth, **the truth was this.** Jesus is the Messiah sent from God out of love for his children so that whoever would believe, and accept his Son could have redemption, forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Where Nicodemus relied on legalism to get the job done. Jesus confronts him with grace. Where Nicodemus had been taught in order to have a close relationship with God one needed to try to do better...they needed to earn it...they needed to read more, pray more, go to church more, suffer more, and on and on. Jesus said. *“Nicodemus you got it all wrong. There is only one thing you need to do and that is believed. You need to believe I came to give you life. You need to know I am about to die for your sins and the sins of the whole world on a cruel cross. You need to believe that in three days after my death our Father in heaven will give me back my life and I will live forever and open the gates of heaven for all who will believe. THAT my friends, is what you have to believe and accept that truth into your heart.”*

You know that truth hasn't changed in all these years. Some have tried to shift the focus. Others have added different things one must do to have eternal life. Others have said there are many ways. Some have said that their way is the only way. But the truth is still the truth and Scripture is still the Scripture and the truth of that Scripture is still the same. Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior repents of their sins, invites him into their hearts becomes not only forgiven, not only given a place in his kingdom, but becomes an heir to Jesus, and becomes a child of God. Nothing else matters. Because if you truly believe then you will follow his way of salvation to the very gates of heaven and beyond.

In the stories of the churches in the Book of Revelation one church we haven't discussed is a church that is considered lukewarm. They are neither hot nor cold for God's mission. They have lost focus on the power and love of God. But in that section we find a jewel. It's an invitation of hope. God's voice: *"I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door I will come in and eat with you, and you will eat with me."*

In searching for one hymn I came upon this one that says what I want to say. Hear these words I found that touched me. So simple...*Deep in my heart there's gladness! Jesus has saved me from sin! Praise to His name, what a Savior! Cleansing without and within! Why do I sing about Jesus? Why is He precious to me? He is my Lord and my Savior; Dying, He set me free!"*

Today could be the beginning of a new and wonderful journey as you begin to follow Jesus Christ. Today you heard Matt speak his story. In the past you've heard Ron, Char and Carole's journeys. We heard Nicodemus' story as he came out of the darkness into the light. He came full circle. From being the teacher, to being the student. From being a legalist to receiving that wonderful grace of God.

*"Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within. Grace, grace God's grace, grace that is greater than all our sins."*

Won't you come out of the darkness of your sin into the light of God's grace? While the choir sings, you are invited to come touch the robe of healing for

sins committed...come touch the robe for grace given. If you are ready to receive Jesus as Savior I'll pray with you. If you want to surrender all to him I will pray with you as well. Your need is what he is here for. Let the Light of Jesus light up your life.

Come; come touch his robe of grace and love.