

Jan. 26, 2014 - Nicodemus

John 3:1-21

“Couldn’t Be More Clear”

Are you confused by the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus? I am. Nicodemus was, too. Looks to me like Jesus recognized this. To me, the last part of today’s reading is Jesus trying to make what he is getting at crystal clear to Nicodemus. So let’s start at the end and work our way forward.

At the end of this reading we find—judgement. Not a word we normally associate with the passage that contains John 3:16. But there it is: “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.”

John’s Gospel is full of language like this, full of judgement right from the get-go. Just listen to a couple verses from chapter 1: “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.” When John speaks of the world he describes a world that rejects God, hides from God, shuns God’s light, and loves deeds of darkness.

Imagine a world that is in rebellion against its maker. Imagine a world that loves darkness, rejects and then kills Jesus. Imagine a world of wars and holocausts and envy, greed, and corruption. Imagine our world at its worst, and you’ve got the idea. John’s Gospel is full of judgement for this world.

But here’s the thing: God loves this world. God loves the world that rejected and killed Jesus. God loves the world that loves darkness. God loves the world of wars and holocausts and envy, greed, and corruption. God so loves this world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. God loves the world that hates God. God loves the world that vexes us, beats us down, oppresses us.

Could you love such a world? God does. And when you are caught up in the corruption and darkness of this world, could you still love yourself? God does. God loves this world, God loves you and me so much that he shines the intense light of his love to drive away our darkness, expose our evil for what it is, so that we might be cleansed, healed, saved and not condemned. “Indeed, God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him.”

Jesus couldn’t be more clear about what he has come to do. Jesus has come to be lifted up for all to see, exalted, glorified by being nailed to a cross. In this way, in this exposing of evil as this healer and proclaimer of good news is tortuously murdered, God hopes to draw all people to himself, to his love, to cleansing, healing, and salvation.

I can’t think of any place in the whole New Testament that is more clear about God’s aim and

Jesus' purpose. Maybe that's because Nicodemus is a seeker. He's curious. If Jesus had had a web page, Nicodemus would have been a lurker. He comes to Jesus at night when none of his Pharisees friends can see what he's doing. He praises Jesus for the signs he does. He wants to know more. He is seeking something and trying to make up his mind about Jesus.

Curiously, Jesus doesn't ask Nicodemus to make a decision. He doesn't ask him to choose between light and darkness. He just speaks those great words of Gospel about how the real sign of God's presence will come when he is lifted up and about how God's light is shining into our darkness.

And curiously, Nicodemus just kind of fades out of the scene. We're don't hear any response from him, and we're not sure at what point he leaves the room. That's the way it is with many seekers. They're curious; they want to know more; they think they might want to have closer relationship with God through Jesus, but they're not sure yet and not ready to commit yet.

Jesus' way of dealing with this seeker is to speak his words of Gospel and to be patient. Instead of asking for a decision, he declares God's judgement and speaks of *God's* decision to love this dark world and then steps back to see what happens.

In today's story Nicodemus just fades away. But he does return, much later to make a public affirmation of his faith in Jesus through his actions, this time performed in full view of the Pharisees and Sadducees. For he and Joseph of Arimathea take Jesus' body down from the cross and bury it in a tomb owned by Joseph.

We are here to hear Jesus calling to us. We are here to proclaim Jesus's great words of Gospel ourselves. We are here to learn to love ourselves in our darkest times just like God does. We are here to love the world and everyone in it just like God does and to be patient with those who are trying to find their way.