

Worship at Home

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Opening words (Psalm 121: 1-2; 7-8)

I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in

From this time on and for evermore.

StF 17: With gladness we worship

With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
Free hearts and free voices, how blessed to bring!
The old thankful story shall seek Thine abode,
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God!

Renewed by Thy Spirit, redeemed by Thy Son,
Thy children would bless Thee for all Thou hast done:

O Father, returning to love and to light,
Our spirits are yearning to praise Thee aright.

Thy right would we give Thee, true homage, Thy due,

And honour eternal, the universe through:
With all Thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
In one acclamation we glorify Thee.

We join with the angels, and so there is giv'n,
From earth, Alleluia, in answer to Heav'n.
Amen! Be Thou glorious below and above,
Redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

George Rawson (1807-1889)

Prayer

Holy God,

In this sacred season of Lent, may I sense your presence ever more closely.

Walking with Jesus as he journeys towards the Cross, help me to take time

And take notice of the still small voice whispering to my heart.

Cause me to grow in faith and understanding,
That I may love and serve you in ever greater measure. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

StF 492: Christ be my leader...

Christ be my leader by night as by day;
safe through the darkness for he is the way.
Gladly I follow, my future his care,
darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.

Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,
drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.
Grant me to trust him, though shifting as sand,
doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand.

Christ be my Saviour in calm as in strife;
death cannot hold me, for he is the life.
Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain
can touch my salvation: with Jesus I reign.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (1926-2024)

Reading: John 3: 1-17

Now 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.

Reflection

Our reading today contains what is probably the most famous conversation in the Bible. Nicodemus no doubt repeated this dialogue to trusted people

after the event, we know he was in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death and made the request to get Jesus' body down for burial before sunset.

Nicodemus was a scholar, a devout man, a man of authority in his community, and yet he felt he had to talk with Jesus at night. Why? Was it because he was scared that he would be noticed if he went in daylight? John tells us in Ch 19 v 38-39 that Joseph of Arimathea kept his following of Jesus a secret out of fear but doesn't say the same of Nicodemus. John notes that Nicodemus defended Jesus to the council in chapter 7. Did Nicodemus prefer to speak with Jesus at night because he could have longer more in-depth conversations uninterrupted? There is a particular ambience which allows for greater openness and vulnerability in a late-night conversation. No pressure to rush, perhaps a fireside chat with a cup of wine.

Nicodemus recognises that Jesus is a man of God and he wants to know more and he is told that no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above. This is difficult for Nicodemus to understand at first and he thinks it's ridiculous. Jesus persists by making the distinction between water and Spirit. It may be that Jesus is referring to the waters of baptism, but in the context of the whole conversation it is likely more basic than that. Water signifies the natural world, perhaps literally referring to the amniotic fluid which surrounds a baby in the womb. Being born from above is a spiritual birth, and as a newborn infant discovers a whole new world, the Kingdom of God is experienced when one is 'born from above'. It's an analogy which first century men would understand, even without our advanced medical knowledge. If we dwell on that analogy for a while, we may conclude that to be 'born from above' is not purely a decision of our own. The baby is born because of the work of the mother.

Did Jesus mean for Nicodemus to recite the 'Sinner's prayer' and receive his ticket to heaven? Or is there a deeper, more profound meaning for him? Nicodemus was a teacher himself, he knew the scriptures, he believed in the promise of God that the Messiah would come and rescue the people. Nicodemus is in a society which has a distinct 'Us

and Them' attitude, he longs for the Kingdom of God where his people don't need to live in fear anymore, where pagan emperors are defeated and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is worshipped alone. He is having to open his heart to a much bigger reality.

Jesus drops the bombshell in the famous verse, "For God so loved the world..." now the Kingdom is not confined to Nicodemus' own community, the whole world is enveloped in God's love. With his newborn spiritual eyes, Nicodemus can see the vastness of the mission of Christ. His life and perspective on the meaning of life is transformed.

When Nicodemus witnessed the death of Jesus on the cross, he must have thought of what Jesus said about being lifted up as Moses lifted the bronze serpent in Numbers 21 v 6-9.

The serpent was a means of healing in the Old Testament story; Nicodemus knew the verse in Isaiah 53 and must have at some point made the connection.

*'But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace
was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.'*

In our Lenten contemplations, may we be like Nicodemus and sit with Jesus. May we allow the Spirit of God to envelop us and transform us. Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17 v 21)

May we live in such a way that people notice.



Let us pray

May your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.
Lord, we pray for those in need of healing in body, mind and spirit.

We pray that your life-giving love breaks through to those who are suffering in the world today.

Help us to help others, show us how to be a blessing.

And as we receive your mercy and grace, may we pass it on to everyone we meet so that your Kingdom of Divine Love and Peace grows and transforms the world. **Amen**

StF 507: O for a heart to praise my God

**O for a heart to praise my God,
a heart from sin set free,
a heart that always feels thy blood
so freely shed for me.**

**A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
my great Redeemer's throne,
where only Christ is heard to speak,
where Jesus reigns alone.**

**A humble, lowly, contrite, heart,
believing, true and clean,
which neither life nor death can part
from him that dwells within.**

**A heart in every thought renewed
and full of love divine,
perfect and right and pure and good,
a copy, Lord, of thine.**

**My heart, thou know'st, can never rest
till thou create my peace;
till of mine Eden repossessed,
from self, and sin, I cease.**

**Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
come quickly from above;
write thy new name upon my heart,
thy new, best name of love.**

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Blessing

The blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you and remain with you
All your days. **Amen**

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