

“Nick at Night” - Stephanie Sorge, 1.25.26

When I was growing up, I enjoyed getting to know certain TV shows that were well before my time, thanks to Nick at Nite - the later programming on Nickelodeon. I watched it back in the early days, when they showed old episodes of I Love Lucy, Happy Days, Bewitched, and I Dream of Jeannie. I was surprised to see that it is still going strong, and horrified to see what now counts as classic television: Friends, The Big Bang Theory, and Young Sheldon, to name a few.

Today we go much further back, to Nicodemus and his visit to Jesus, under the cover of night. As we journey through John's gospel, we should take notice of the frequent mention of “the Jews.” There are reasons for it in the context in which it was written, but it is really problematic. John's portrayal of “the Jews” is far from positive, and it has become part of the entrenched anti-semitism in the church. Unfortunately, anti-semitism is still alive and well in many parts of the church and in society; it's not just a thing of the past.

All that to say, the fact that Nicodemus is immediately identified as a Pharisee and a leader of the Jews would ordinarily set off warning bells. We might expect a confrontation, but Nicodemus' visit to Jesus is genuine. He's not playing a game of Gotcha, as we see elsewhere in the Gospels. He really wants to know more about Jesus and what he's all about. But, given his position, he apparently feels like he has to go under the cover of night.

There is another historical dichotomy in the church that we need to be aware of as we read John. Light and dark are major themes in this gospel. Jesus is the light of the world, a light that darkness cannot overcome. Light also means understanding, and darkness, confusion. Light good, darkness bad. Unfortunately, this has also been woven into the sinful system of white supremacy. We need to be aware of that as we read.

Nicodemus' nighttime visit is not only about hiding from the other Jewish leaders. It also signifies his confusion. Nicodemus remains in the dark when it comes to Jesus's teaching. Even so, he shows up. He wants to understand. His faithful curiosity persists to the end.

Jewish New Testament Scholar, Dr. Amy-Jill Levine, has a slightly less charitable reading. She writes, "I appreciate his willingness to pursue what he finds interesting and important; however, his stealthy approach remains for me a problem. It takes courage to admit what we do not know and to seek answers; it may take even more courage to let others know that we are seeking, that we do not know everything, that we may need help."¹

I have always appreciated Trinity's willingness to ask questions and sit outside the comfort of certainty. It's a deeply faithful posture, but I think it's not a

¹ *The Gospel of John*, by Amy-Jill Levine, p. 24. Copyright 2024

very common position to find in many Christian churches. We are pilgrims on a journey, seeking and learning together. But then, who leads the pilgrims?

Today we ordain and install a new class of Elders. There is always some degree of fear and trembling in this task, the nagging question, “Am I enough? Do I know enough? Am I faithful enough? Do I have enough to offer? Am I up to this call?” This is not merely serving on a governing board; this is spiritual leadership. It’s servant leadership. It should give us pause.

The answer to all of those questions is yes - with God’s help. The church needs leaders who are fully aware of their reliance on God to fulfill this duty. Leaders who are willing to ask questions, and hungry to learn and grow as people and as disciples of Jesus. Also, these leaders need you. They need your prayers and support in this work. Church is a team sport! In fact, we just might have some extra Time and Talent sheets available to complete if you haven’t already done so. God calls us to the work of transformation. God calls us to be the body of Christ to show the whole world God’s love. It’s big work! None of us can do it on our own.

In this age of divisiveness and firmly entrenched sides, may we all have the courage of uncertainty. May we all be enriched with holy curiosity. And may we all continue to seek after Jesus together, as the body of Christ. Amen.