

Sermon- Our Saviors Lutheran Church- March 11th, 2018,
4th Sunday in Lent

Nicky at Night

Grace and peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. What a great Gospel lesson we have before us today. It's a story about Nicodemus or as I titled this homiletical exercise – Nicky at Night.

Nicodemus is an Old Testament guy, actually an Old Testament Scholar. The Old Testament is a fascinating compilation of books which for most of us is rather unfamiliar. Our images of the Old Testament are mainly fleeting reflections from our Sunday School classes.

Reminds me of a cute story. A young boy comes home from Sunday School and his parents ask him what he learned. He replies "how God made the first humans". His parents ask him to explain it. He replies "well, first God made the man. Then the man got lonesome for some company, so God rocked the man to sleep, and then took out the man's brains and made a woman out of them."

The Old Testament is, for most of us, a foreign book, only occasionally looked at. For the record, it encompasses 39 books, approximately 1,038 pages. Three times the size of the New Testament. A pious Jew, like Nicodemus, used the Old Testament as the guide for moral, ethical and spiritual decision making. It was quite the system. If it is written, one was supposed to do it. If it was not written, one could avoid the task. Rather simplistic and easy to follow. For Nicodemus it was a do it yourself manual for eternal life. And this do it yourself manual had laws to follow. Laws that one was obligated to follow. The problem for Nicodemus was that the laws numbered 613! Can you imagine 613? We have considerable trouble with ten.

Here is just a sampling.

#110- no work on the Sabbath-(even pushing an elevator button)

#117- no interest charged on a loan to a Jewish person

#273- Living in Egypt forbidden

#409- Obligation to tithe. (How would that work for us)

And some more:

Kosher rules

Can eat seafood that has fins and scales- Lobster/Shrimp and Crabs out.

Can not mix meat and dairy- separate plates required.

Can only eat meat that chews cud and has a split hoof. Pigs are out. Deer are ok but probably have to jump on it. Stuff about shooting and the right way to drain the blood.

Meat with sciatic nerve a problem. Filet Mignon and sirloin steak out. The meat had to be free of blood. So probably had to bounce off the floor- really well done. You get the idea- laws which are very hard to perfectly follow.

That's the background- now enter the Gospel for today.

Nicodemus, a leader of the Pharisees and a member of the Sanhedrin, the group which later finds Jesus guilty, comes to Jesus for some theological discussion. It's dark, maybe midnight. He doesn't want to be seen talking to Jesus. He has a problem. He can't keep all the laws. Eternal life could be elusive. Put yourself in Nick's situation. Or maybe you already have.

You're a sincere person. Maybe you work for a local paper company or an insurance company. You have a wife, 2 children, a dog, a picket fence, 2 cars- one owned by the bank. You have 401 K and a mother-in-law that only visits once a year. In other words you have relative peace and comfort except that your children are teenagers. You want to keep the laws like Nicky, but in spite of yourself you seem to break them on a regular basis. Batting 300 is great in baseball but not so hot for Nicky and us. On a regular basis Nick and many of us get selfish/ put other Gods first/anger controls us/we abuse stuff rather than use moderation/judge others/exhibit unconcern rather than empathy. You get the idea.

So Nicky has a long conversation. Being born again. Exegeses!!! The key discussion centers on Verses 16 and 17. He gives Nicky and us the key kernel. The answer about eternal life and what we need to do to receive it. It's the sign you see at Packer games and it doesn't mean row 3, seat 16. Say it with me!!!

And verse 17 is as profound. It's so simple for all of us. Jesus knows that we cannot keep all the commandments and the laws all the time. It's as if he says to Nicky and Jane, Bob, Tom, Mary and Dennis- I know that you can't keep all the laws. That's why I came. Just believe in me and you will have eternal life. And when you know that I have given you the gift of eternal life- undeserved- you will keep the commandments out of sheer joy not out of fear. If we believe in Him our lives will change.

Nicodemus got it. Later he helps prepare the body of Jesus along with Joseph of Arimathea. He becomes a believer. He got it- just believe in Jesus.

Now for God's sake, can we?

Amen- Let it be so.