

Reading: John 3:1-17

I don't always like going to parties. When they discover what I do, I either get harangued about the Cathedral in the Square or someone wants to plan their funeral. But this person was different. She had a story to share. She had been about to die and then unexpectedly a total stranger had given her a transplant. As she told me, the tears began to well up in her eyes. "It's as if" she said, "I have been given my life to start over again."

What could this possibly feel like?

Nicodemus was a thinker and a wealthy man. He sneaks to see Jesus by night. He doesn't want others to know he has come. As a member of the Jewish council and a buyer of spices, he is wealthy, powerful and respected. He is way too cool for Sunday School. So he sneaks. He's a sneaker and a seeker. He asks Jesus, "What is it like to become your follower?" Jesus explains in as simple as terms as he can what it means. A change will come over you that I can't really put into words, he says, but it will be like being born over again. It will be like starting over all over again. It will be like having the gift of life given to you afresh.

This week one of our own has had just that happen to them. Because the business had invested the time to train staff in CPR and buy a defibrillator this person is still with us. I am delighted to say we have had an anonymous donation of a defibrillator for church and we need to do the training too. What a wonderful gift. We may never need it or we might, either way it's a beautiful gift.

My friend Phil was buying a fridge. He is a surf lifesaver. He looked over and saw the man at the desk suddenly slump forward. His training kicked in. He leapt over the counter, did CPR on the unconscious man. When the ambulance arrived, the crew said, "You saved his life." On returning to the counter, he asked if he could have 10% off his new fridge. "No mate," they said, "We appreciate all you have done but we really didn't like him that much."

What has your journey to faith been like? Was it like being born over again, or did you grow more gradually into faith? CS Lewis, the famous Anglican theologian and writer, described himself as the most reluctant convert in all of Christendom. For the writer of the Narnia Chronicles, it was more an exercise in eliminating the intellectual obstacles. Having made the commitment, he then felt the joy. In His book *Surprised by Joy* Lewis said that becoming a Christian was for him like when the

bell goes at school for the summer holidays, except the bell had gone for the rest of his life.

What way do you come to Jesus today? Are you a Nicodemus sneaking in by night, not quite sure if it's for you? Maybe you are like my party friend, overwhelmed with the joy of it all. Maybe you are more of a CS Lewis, still exploring the arguments. Or maybe you have been on a journey since your earlier days, quietly growing and deepening.

It's interesting to trace Nicodemus progress. He appears a couple of times later in John's gospel and is no longer the reluctant sneaker by night. By John Chapter 7, he stands up to the rest of the Council and defends Jesus innocence. By Chapter 19, he is so committed that he gives 100 pounds of costly spice for Jesus burial.

I like Nicodemus. He is very slow to get it. That leaves me room to be slow too.

The season of Lent began as a time of preparation for all those to be baptised at Easter. Those to be baptised prepared with fasting, acts of mercy and prayer. So helpful was this time of preparation that soon the whole congregation joined with them. At Easter we will reaffirm our baptism. Even if your baptism was a long time ago and particularly if your baptism was a long time ago, I invite you to meditate on Nicodemus; on his faith journey. And ask yourself what imagine you would use for the joy you have in Christ. Is it like being born anew? Or is it like having a transplant and being given a whole new lease on life.

To know we are truly loved and held and cherished by God. This is the journey and the destination. This is our true identity.

One poet¹ reflecting on Nicodemus puts it like this:

You are returning from
seeing the rabbi
from Nazareth,
making your way past
doorways of shadows,
past the street corners'
intersecting griefs,
past the windows
where ghosts lean out
to question the sky lit by
the same stars that held
promise for Abraham

so long ago.
Long ago you stopped
asking the stars for clarity.
Long ago your heart
became evening,
gray and empty
as old promises
of a new kingdom
of God.
But tonight you walked
these streets to meet
this new rabbi,
this one who breaks patterns,
this challenger of authority,
this maker of wine
from simple water,
to hear words like
a light flickering
at the edges
of sight,
a lamp kindled inside.
You feel almost as if
breath itself has taken
new shape within you:
the shape that hope forms
when it is growing anew.
Do not wonder
at that which stirs
within you, Nicodemus.
It is your heart
becoming morning
once again.

¹From Andrew King's "Heart becoming morning" Lectionary Weblog