

A Unique Path to Faith

8 March, 2020

Lent 2

Reading: John 3:1-8

We all have a unique path to faith. Jesus starts where we are, and we grow from there.

Open the Bible to us O God in a fresh and exciting way.

In Jesus name we ask it.

Amen

It is easy to say when our lives begin. I was born in the Ranfurly Maternity Hospital. Mum loved it because I was one of only two babies born that month and the hospital had its own garden, so mum got fresh veggies every day. Not long after that the maternity hospital was shut down and building was turned into a place for the mentally disturbed and you can imagine what my family say about that!

It's easy to say when we are physically born but it can be harder to say when we become a Christian.

For some people becoming Christian is so dramatic and the change in their lives is so huge that they use the language of today's Gospel to describe the process - it is like being born over again. For others it is a gradual process but with an ever-deepening sense of God's love.

I heard of two prawns who lived at the bottom of the sea. One was called Geoff and the other Christian. They were good friends and played every day. They loved their life, but Geoff was jealous of the sharks. Geoff looked with envy at the fear that the mighty sharks caused the other fish. So, Geoff explained to Christian that he was going to ask Neptune to turn him into a shark. This he did but he found that although he liked scaring the other fish, he missed swimming with his friend. So he asked Neptune to change him back into a

crustacean. Searching for his friend he called out “Come swim with me.” “I can’t,” his friend called back, “I’m frightened,” “Don’t worry, you can trust me I’m a prawn again Christian!”

In our passage today Jesus is in conversation with Nicodemus. But Nicodemus doesn’t instantly come to faith, rather it is a gradual process. First Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. Maybe he is frightened of what people might think of him coming to this radical rabbi after all he has a lot to lose. He is a pharisee, a member of the ruling council, a person of influence - rich from buying and selling spices. But we can see Nicodemus’ journey to faith. By Chapter 7 of John's gospel Nicodemus is openly talking with Jesus and by chapter 19 he is fully committed.

Jill, a pakeha woman in her forties, describes her coming to faith like this...

I didn’t grow up in a Christian family. My mum did take us to church when we were children, but I had no concept of a relationship with God.

Then one Saturday night I was slumped on the sofa watching, “Who Wants to be a Millionaire,” and a question came up on the Bible and I remember thinking I should be able to answer that question - it wasn’t a difficult question - and in a flash of inspiration I thought I’m going to put a Bible on my Christmas list this year to improve my general knowledge.

I was at work talking to a friend about my request for a Bible for Christmas and my conversation was overheard by a colleague. She was quite a gentle person she came up to me afterwards and said, “I’m a Christian.” and that’s when she told me about a course - a chance to explore Christianity through Mark’s Gospel.

I thought, “No way am I doing a course like that.” Nobody I knew would consider doing something like that and I certainly wasn’t going to. So, I was surprised to find myself turning up for the first lesson a short time afterwards. First impressions were good - great buzz in the room, lively people, good conversation. I loved the format of the course, but I thought, “Well, I’ll just

come along for one or two, and then I'll walk away." Actually, I didn't miss a single session. And overall, I was just blown away by the figure of Jesus walking off the pages of Mark's Gospel to me and really talking to me.

And I got to the end of the course. I had a lot of questions, but I wasn't ready to become a Christian. I kept asking myself, "What is going to happen to me if I become Christian? Am I going to wake up as a transformed personality with a halo shining over my head? What about my lifestyle, my smoking, my drinking, what would my friends and family think of me?" I didn't think that I was the kind of person that God would want to have as a Christian. But I did start to pray about it, and I did go to church more frequently.

A few months later I fractured my knee in a skiing accident, which at the time I didn't see as an answer to prayer! I was devastated I was off work for weeks, how was work going to be able to cope without me - how would I cope without work?!

But actually, it was during that time that I had the solitude to reflect upon what I had learned. I listened to Bible talks and I came to understand that I didn't have to be good enough for God because Jesus had died for me, and that the Christian life is a journey. I would have the Holy Spirit in me working with me every step of the way and it was a fantastically liberating experience to understand that truth. I was still on crutches when I became Christian. (Jill's story is from the Christianity Explored website)

I wonder what your journey to faith looks like. Was it a dramatic prawn again moment or were you frightened of what others might think like Nicodemus or was it a 'Who wants to be a Millionaire' moment like Jill?

You see the good news of today's Gospel is that not one size fits all. God accepts you where you are on your faith path. You don't have to be anybody but yourself, God has a unique faith journey shaped just right for you.

But be sure of this. God's love is calling you. Gently, persistently God is calling you into more and more meaning, more and more purpose and he has more and more grace for your life.