

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service/passage.

Week beginning Sunday 8 March 2020 Night visitor – putting Jesus first

Pray Praise God for his readiness to demonstrate his love for us even, especially, when we let him down – even when we may be reticent to let on that we are interested. Thank God that he looks kindly upon every little tentative step we take in response to his great love without a thought of dismissing our hesitant overtures. Pray that as we move once again toward Easter we may be more open to receive Christ who gave his all for us out of unstinting love.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). John 3:1-17.

Background John relates an unusual meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, an important official of the religious establishment and an acknowledged teacher. There is a bit of banter between them, and the cut and thrust of religious debate, while not Jesus' normal approach with crowds, is readily adopted. Secrecy was needed (for the time being) so as not to compromise Nicodemus' position with the Council but implicit in the exchange is the understanding that at some point Nicodemus will have to be open. Jesus makes it plain that notwithstanding Nicodemus' status and learning – bottom line – he (as we all) had to come empty handed and be accepted simply by grace. We have the famous verse – 3:16 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Hiding our faith – Jesus doesn't send Nicodemus packing because he came to him secretly. He didn't say that he had to publicly profess his faith in the market place in the morning. He started from where Nicodemus was and gradually nudged him in the direction of faith and service. Why can we be so reluctant to be open with our faith? How might Jesus' approach here encourage us? Do we expect too much from enquirers, people dipping their toe in the water? How might a more gradual approach allowing gentle exploration work?
2. Knowledge and experience – Many people back off from any discussion about the Bible or faith because deep down they don't think that they know enough – out of fear of “putting their foot in it”. How do deal with these concerns? How might we dispel the notion that you have to be clever or knowledgeable to get to know God/Jesus better?
3. Empty handed – Jesus certainly welcomed Nicodemus. He didn't lay out a whole lot of pre-conditions for their chat. What lessons might we learn from this approach? But he didn't go along with all of Nicodemus' ideas. Being gentle, Jesus got Nicodemus to see that all his learning and knowledge, status and experience as a religious leader and teacher paled into insignificance – what he really need to do was come empty handed and trust in his love. Why do we find coming empty handed so hard? What gets in the way of trusting only in Jesus and not in “what we have going for us”?
4. Putting Jesus first – we have many responsibilities – to family, perhaps to work, to the authorities, yes maybe to church, arguably to ourselves so it can be hard to always put Jesus first. Why is it so important? How might it help to focus on a verse like John 3:16 and to see that anything we do pales into nothing compared with the love Jesus demonstrated for us on the cross and which he promises to uphold by being with us always to the end of time? The cross shouldn't be a rod to beat us, but a sign of love that frees us. Any thoughts on this and how it might change us from being chained by obligation to being set free to loving service?
5. The christian faith is based on acceptance by grace, forgiveness freely offered – not by us trying to earn it. But that doesn't mean that it wasn't costly to God. Jesus death and resurrection underpins our forgiveness and acceptance. Without being morbid about it, how should the cross help us to follow Jesus and serve him and others for his sake, willingly and without it being a chore?
6. Anything else that might have prompted a thought or question on the theme or passage?

Prayer: Lord, thank you not just for welcome Nicodemus by night, but for accepting all of us, not because we deserve it but because of your generous and costly love. Help us to respond willingly in love. Amen.