

“Let There Be Light”

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John 3: 1-17

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Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night wanting to understand more. It's a curious story because here was a man who was highly educated but didn't understand.

My cousin and his family came to visit last weekend. Both he and his wife (and frankly the entire family including the 3 year-old twins) are insanely smart. Both are university professors: one in Climatology and the other Primatology. We have a great relationship and my husband and I are always teasing them about their intelligence. Someone will ask a question about how to do something, like the right way to cook spaghetti squash or how to get the Apple TV working and either Alex or I will say 'Ask Sarah, she has a PhD, she'll know how!' It's just a silly thing we do and it's of course ridiculous – just because you know a whole lot about the gestation of a Japanese Macaque does not mean you know much about anything else, cooking spaghetti squash included. My cousins do know a lot about a lot – especially in the realm of science, an area in which I know next to nothing – but still there are limits, and they are very aware of that.

Nicodemus had a lot going for him. He was a religious leader and it's clear that he was high up in the Jewish religion. So as such he had respect and power. He was also pretty well off, and he likely came from a good family. Nicodemus had a lot going for him; but as he saw what Jesus was saying and doing, he didn't understand.

I think it's interesting that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. He comes to ask questions at night because he doesn't want to be seen – he has a reputation to uphold, and Jesus' reputation among the other religious leaders wasn't so good. But I can't help but see the darkness through a literary lens. The darkness is practical –it hides him – but it is also a pathetic fallacy. That's when nature or the weather reflects what is going on in the story, like when something scary is going to happen it's a 'dark and stormy night.' The fact that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night reflects that obscurity in Nicodemus's mind. Smart, educated Nicodemus just doesn't get what Jesus is saying. He is in the dark.

When people don't understand something, there are usually two options or two ways of responding. The first is to be humble about it and say: "I don't understand this and I'd like to hear more." But in order to do that, you have to be willing to acknowledge that you don't know everything and you have to be willing to admit that there is more that you could learn. Have you ever asked someone for directions and had someone tell you confidently where to go, only to find out later they had no clue? People hate to admit that they don't know something, don't they?! It makes you feel stupid to admit you don't know.

Often when someone doesn't understand, they will pretend they do understand and or they will close their heart and mind to it altogether; especially when it challenges their way of thinking. I think that's what happens whenever we confront something and unfamiliar.

We have certainly seen that with the increasing amount of Islamophobia in our society.

Wednesday was International Women's Day, and I thought it was pretty cool that they filled the seats of Parliament in Ottawa with women. They called the project "Daughters of the Vote" and there were women coming from and sitting in the seats of each riding across the country.



One of them, Srosh Hassan, who lives in the riding of Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan in Alberta, stood and spoke to explain to her fellow Canadians what it's like to be a 21-year-old Muslim woman "in a time of overwhelming stigma." "Islamophobia is a heavy word in today's discourse, but it is

heaviest for those who are on the receiving end of it," she said, shaking with emotion. "In a country I call my own, my identity is challenged and my actions are heavily scrutinized. I am simultaneously silenced into shame while being expected to apologize for the actions of a small group of people that do not represent me."

Last night there was a huge and wonderful pot-luck dinner here at the church hosted by the Islamic community for all of the refugees who have arrived in Brockville and for the people who have helped to bring those refugees here. I counted representatives from 9 different churches, but there may have been others. There were something like 150 people in the gym and there was a wonderful feeling in the room that I wished everyone could experience.

The acting Imam, Ahmad Khadra, told the story of the first Mosque built in Canada. If I had to guess, I would not have guessed that the first one built was in Edmonton (I think I would have guessed a city like Toronto or Montreal). I also would not have guessed that the community came together to help build the Mosque. Money was raised by Christian Churches and the Jewish community in 1938(!) so that the small Muslim community could have their own space to worship.



We have the choice to seek out and ask questions when we do not understand, or to simply harden our hearts. It seems that the group who were most likely to harden their hearts in Jesus' day sadly were those who claimed to be closest to God – the religious leaders of the day. But Nicodemus was different. Even though he didn't understand, he was open and searching. He recognized something in Jesus. He saw something that intrigued him and seemed good and even of God, and he wanted to know more. Right away he says to Jesus: 'We know you must be from God because who could do these miracles apart from God?' So he recognizes that spark that comes from God, which I think is impressive right there. Nicodemus has a humility and an openness, which was combined with a focus on God. Those two things together – 1. openness and 2. a focus on God – are a powerful and wonderful combination.

But still it takes something more to understand. It takes the Holy Spirit.

Even when you are open to understanding something, it can be hard. When my oldest child, who is now in first-year university, was going into grade 1 we had just moved to the city of Calgary from a rural area. This presented us with an opportunity to send her to a French school. I had gone to school in French and always valued being bilingual. So Anna who had no French background was enrolled at École de la Source. And it was hard. By early December I was beginning to think we had made a mistake. She just wasn't catching on to French – she wasn't speaking it and she wasn't understanding it much either. I was starting to think that we should pull her out and put her in an English school, but her teacher told us to be patient and wait a while longer. She was confident that it would click for Anna. We weren't so sure.

You see, from our adult view of things we thought we should be seeing progress. We were certainly not expecting her to be top of the class, but we thought that a few months into her schooling we would see some basic improvement. That's how it is for an adult when you learn a language. You memorize a certain number of words and then you figure how to use them correctly in a sentence; there is a sense of natural progress and development. We thought she should be climbing little steps to go higher and higher in the language. But that's not how it happened at all, and her teacher was wise enough to know how it would come together.

Instead of little steps, it was more like a light switch was flicked on. It was more like this classic scene from National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation. You remember perhaps that throughout the movie Clark is working on the most spectacular display of Christmas lights in the neighbourhood. He strings 25,000 incandescent bulbs on his house with goodness knows how many extension cords, but he just can't get them to light up ...that is until someone inadvertently flicks a switch.

(Follow this link if you want to see this) <https://youtu.be/iXaw70X7wb4>

That's how it happened with my daughter. All of a sudden, at the end of January, Anna was speaking and understanding French. All of a sudden we went

from chaos to 'let there be light'! It was amazing. Now of course things had been building and progressing in her very elastic young mind -- we just couldn't see those inner workings.

Have you ever had one of those 'click' moments when something makes sense?

Jesus calls those moments 'revelation.' He says that they come from God – you can't just find them in a book. That doesn't mean you don't search for answers in a book, but sometimes we need a 'click to understand'. In the forever classic song 'Amazing Grace', the author says: "I once was lost but now I'm found ... was blind but now I see." I often experience that when I am reading a passage from scripture. You know sometimes you will read a part of scripture that you've read 100 times or more before, and suddenly something fresh jumps out and you get it.

I have had little 'clicks' or moments of revelation every week. In our Celebrate Life service we call them 'God Sightings'. I've had big ones too, like the time I was in my 2nd year of university and a woman invited me into her room to chat, and she said very directly to me: "Kim, I think you are called to be a minister, and I can imagine you going off and doing something else and then realizing it sometime when you reach your 40's." Then she said, "Don't waste your time – do it now." As she spoke those words, it was like a lightning bolt went through me, and I knew that this was God's call. It wasn't just 'following in my father's footsteps' – it was *my* calling.

It is from John 3:3-7 that the term 'born again' comes.
"No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above... no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit ..."

Jesus was saying to Nicodemus that he needed that revelation from the Holy Spirit to understand. His brain wasn't going to be enough – he needed to be open to the Spirit.

Now in this passage Nicodemus doesn't quite get to the Ah ha moment when the light is clicked on. But the extension cords were being laid out that would make it possible that one day he would get it. John's gospel makes it clear that he continued to seek out and follow Jesus. In John 7:50 Nicodemus is described as "one of them," and he defends Jesus before the other religious leaders and argues that Jesus should be heard before he is judged. After Jesus has died, Nicodemus purchases at great expense the ointment for his embalming. He provides a mixture of myrrh and aloe weighing 100 pounds which is an enormous amount and out of proportion. It seems he went above and beyond to honour his Lord.

What was it that Jesus wanted him to understand? The heart of it lies in what has become one of the favourite and best known passages of scripture of all time in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that he sent his only son, that whosoever believes in him would not perish but have everlasting life."* At the heart of it is love. *For God so loved the world* – that's not just the Jewish people.

That's not just religious people. That's not just nice, polite Canadians. It's the world, it's everyone. At the heart of it is relationship, not rules, and life – abundant and everlasting life.

I don't know if you have had a Clark Griswold experience of the light of faith suddenly shining in your life in dramatic fashion, or even small light bulbs of faith, or if you are still searching and feeling a little in the dark.

I have come to trust that as I search, God will reveal and show his love. It is our job to search and to be open, and it is God's job to reveal himself.

Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. Open your heart to hearing God and seek him out. And as you seek, may the light switch be flicked on and the lights of revelation and love shine brightly in your life. Thanks be to God