

**“Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus...  
he came to Jesus by night.”**

**Nicodemus, attracted to Jesus and yet baffled by him,  
sneaks out one night to ask some questions.**

**As someone who is very much attracted to and yet still baffled by Jesus,  
I have been asking myself about ways to help  
me move forward in this really marvelous yet often maddening  
adventure and challenge we share of being a human being,  
even with the help of the amazing gift and grace of our faith tradition.**

**Today I'm reminded that:**

**first, the questions are always welcome,  
actually necessary.**

**Even Mary of Nazareth, before she said yes to Gabriel's announcement  
that she was invited to be the mother of the Messiah,  
asked a clarifying question.**

**Second, welcome news to some and a terrifying prospect to others,  
ours is a mystical, inward and contemplative way in the world.**

**And third,  
probably also equally welcome to some and untenable for others,  
ours is an outward, active, even activist way.**

**These are three among other traits without which  
I do not think we are authentically Christian  
and without which we are defectively human.**

**The journey of our life together as people of faith,  
from the start to our final breath, has to leave room for questions.**

**Today Nicodemus, a religious expert with all the answers  
laid out in dogma and practice,**

**has a gnawing intuition that there might be more.**

**In response to his questions, Jesus indeed reveals there's more--  
much more--and some of it is stupendous:**

**"Being born from above...God so loved the world...may have eternal  
life....not perish, not to condemn but to save."**

**Blessed assurance.**

**Yet each word of assurance gives way to another question.**

**"How are we born from above?" "Will the whole world be saved?"**

**This morning's Gospel episode of NICK AT NIGHT shows us,  
gives us permission, welcomes us into  
questioning, seeking, wondering.**

**It is an invitation into continual, deeper exploration of  
all that is fresh, new, and mysterious.**

**Coming to Jesus in the dark to ask a question doesn't mean lack of faith  
but rather is testimony to our thirst for deeper and more authentic faith.**

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**We have a few clues today about the unique makeup  
of the mystical GIFT our life holds for us  
as a people who are baptized:**

**immersed into the very life, death, and new life of Jesus.**

**His life, his death, his intimacy with God, his work in the world are ours.**

**We have emerged from that font,  
which is both a *tomb* from which we stumble forth alive**

**in ways the dead culture and ideas and business as usual around us  
cannot imagine,**

**and that font is a *womb*, from which we are lifted as newly born,  
heavenly born, ready to grow and develop into our full humanity.**

**These weeks of Lent are a season of *appreciation*  
of the complex beauty and challenge springing forth from this gift.**

**With Nicodemus, we properly ask again and again:  
What can I expect from all of this and what will it demand from me?**

**After we ask, then what?**

**Nicodemus can't understand the responses Jesus offers  
because he has forgotten**

**that we are heirs to an ancient, mystical way of living.**

**He came to Jesus by night in caution and fear of exposure.**

**He was not ready to take in the mysteries Jesus opens for him  
that night.**

**Heart speaks to heart in the night,  
when lovers kiss,**

**when falling stars animate the sky  
as they always have over ancient Mediterranean deserts  
and still do over northern California communities.**

**In the night come words and images  
from ancient deserts and dreams.**

**Sarah and Abraham saw the star-filled sky**

**And discovered that faith wasn't a list of doctrines**

**But a loving, trusting relationship into which God welcomed them.**

**The prophet Daniel saw in the night visions  
one like a human being coming from the heavens,  
a cosmic image of a healed and healing humanity.**

**In the night Jacob began to find order in his dead-end life  
when he saw a ladder of vibrant life  
connecting the visible and invisible worlds.**

**In the night Joseph of the house of David  
listened to an angelic dream telling him to take his wife and son  
and dare to be refugees, to flee in uncertainty toward safety  
and a new future.**

**In the night while praying the apostle Peter  
was freed and beckoned from a Roman prison  
to move back into a hostile environment  
to continue teaching, testifying, gathering, and healing.**

**Nicodemus on that night  
could not hear the mystery, the summons, the love,  
the gift, the invitation, to fuller life.**

**He could not break free from conventional thinking,  
cautious calculating, and dullness of imagination.**

**Jesus had words of tender assurance, the invitation to joyful surrender,  
and the interpretation of the cross itself  
as a radiant sign of healing and hope.**

**Nicodemus may not have cultivated his mystical heart and vision, his  
willingness to let God speak in beauty and poetry and music.**

**The direction for, the divine impulse for,**

and the delight in  
 our life fully lived  
 likely won't be found in the bright sunlight  
 of theological creeds and catechisms.  
 Our questioning and our responding happens  
 in the soft, steady glow of the moonlight.  
 We'll see it again in about a month under the Passover moon  
 as we circle that font again at the Great Vigil of Easter.  
 How will you drink in the mystic roots of our common life?  
 Can you find a way this lent  
 to recover your call, your initial inspiration,  
 your deepest and constant connection to God's call and voice and heart?  
 Listen in a new way for how God might be calling you to be truly God's by  
 being truly *you*.

From our shared mystical heritage and present-day experience  
 we then receive prompts toward action.  
 Sarah and Abraham, ready for death are called to new life  
 And a new engagement with the world.  
 As they get up, leave home and friends and family, set out on pilgrimage,  
 They show us what can happen when we let go of what's familiar  
 and let God show us where our life might lead.  
 Jesus, after nights in prayer on the mountain  
 in mystic communion with the divine origin of his life and ours,  
 comes at dawn to call others, gathering, teaching,

**testifying to the truth, feeding the famished, renouncing violence,  
welcoming the outcast, caring for the health of the sick,  
bringing life out of death.**

**Jesus formed and still forms circles of followers...partners...  
to share in these divine actions here in and for the world God loves.**

**Each of us in the circle takes up some part of this healing work:**

**by standing for the truth,  
by denouncing racism or attacks on religious groups,  
by using every worldly means to share gifts of medicine and healing,  
to welcome the stranger and those fleeing for safety or opportunity,  
for justice in business and in government,  
for preservation of and advocacy for our planet's bounty,  
for the upholding of the dignity of each person.**

**Without our continuing searching and questioning,  
without our finding the mystical frame for hearing and responding to  
the divine call and command,  
and without movement to act individually and collectively  
for the possibilities Jesus has demonstrated,  
we will have lost out on the chance, our only chance, this one life,  
to be closer to the full humanity and vitality which God offers.**

**The offered gift is divine life itself,  
not condemnation... but a place at the feast.**