

- [Romans 4:1-5, 13-17](#)
- [John 3:1-17](#)
- [Psalm 121](#)

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Do you remember the children's game, "Simon Says?"

The game where one person tells you exactly what to do.

The game is designed around listening to instruction and who has told you what to do.

How many of you were tricked after commands of "Simon Says touch your nose, Simon Says Jump Up and down, Simon says sit down, Stand up" and you stood up.

We got into the habit of following command after command and then....

We forget how specifically we are to do what we are doing!

As a camp counselor, I will admit, this exercise was often used to fill time, spend some energy, and to see who was listening.

Sometimes the wrong thing was done because the camper just wanted to move on.

In this exercise, though, you are always given the way forward to progress.

By listening and obeying.

It's also very clear about what the direction is.

This game did not promote strategy
nor deliberation.

There were no questions or dialogue permitted

The game is simple, Simon says it or Simon did not.

While the game has several purposes (as I have mentioned),
it is very concrete, black and white. Easy to do.

Follow in this way (End POINT) or you are out.

The game is straightforward until we have questions,

Who was Simon?

Why does Simon get to be the authority?

Why do we all willingly play this game?

What sort of community are we building if the game is all about our own
success and not building each other's listening capabilities?

Did you know that the first time the game Simon Says was mentioned in
print was in 1842 in the Boston Morning Post? April 25th to be exact! The
paper mentions:

*Simon is a great talker; sometimes **he says "up,"** sometimes **he says***

“down,” and sometimes **he says “wiggle waggle.”** *It is always cheapest to do as Simon says.*ⁱ

Chasing this rabbit trail a little further, other sources say the game goes back to Roman times to Cicero (1st century BC). *“Statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero said to do something, you did it.”*ⁱⁱ

Curious, right?!

Well, we are no longer subjects of Cicero and we don’t wiggle waggle much any more... and yet we play along and follow this Simon and what he says.

In this spirit of questioning, we find in our Gospel reading today, a fellow seeker of the “why” of all things, Nicodemus.

Nicodemus, as a pharisee and faithful Jew, has been following the teachings of the Torah all of his life. He has followed and obeyed. In short, he has been faithful.

Unlike the disciples, we do not know who Nicodemus’ people were or what they did.

We do not know when Nicodemus first heard Jesus speak.

Curiously, Nicodemus also only appears in the Gospel of John.

Today’s reference is the first of his two appearances.

The fact that he is named in this Gospel means that he was known in the community.

Nicodemus comes to visit at night.

I have a friend that says, “Nothing good happens after 9pm” - which is often true in this day and age. So, it is easy for us to think that Nicodemus was visiting with a not so genuine intent.

In Jesus’ time, though, to arrive at night allowed for conversation, deep listening and teaching. The sort of teaching where you had time to hear the familiar stories shared in a new way.

The tv channel, Nickelodeon, called their nighttime programming Nick at Night- the time when the classics came out.

Today, our “Nick (Nicodemus) at Night” comes to discover more about the why is “Jesus saying these things and doing these things” and unpack these teachings.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus and asks “What do you mean” by this being born again?

Nicodemus engages Jesus with respect as a fellow teacher. He engages in the Jewish banter of rabbis asking questions to learn more and to dig deeper, to discover, to find the way forward.

What should he, Nicodemus, do next?
In what manner should his life be shaped?
Has all that he has learned in his life up to this point meant nothing?
Nicodemus comes with wonder, curiosity, and tenacity.

Unlike Cicero or Simon, Jesus speaks in the gray.
Now don't get me wrong, throughout the Gospel, Jesus speaks directly
about how to love each other, giving direction concretely to his disciples.
To Nicodemus, Jesus knows that this is a moment to breathe in and invite
this wise and learned teacher into a new space.

Into a new way.

Instead of mapping out the path to salvation with a series of decisions,
Jesus invites Nicodemus to think beyond the brain's knowledge
and to be transformed in heart and soul by water and the Holy Spirit.
To be born again, to remember again, being one with God.
To reconnect with the one who loved you from the beginning, even as the
breath of God hovered over the water, even as the Israelites wandered in
the wilderness grumbling and doubting.
To reconnect with the God who is present here in our midst- just as much
as we know the wind exists because it is felt within the rustle of the trees
and seen in the bending of limbs.

The way to go forward, Jesus says, is to let go and be loved in the manner that God is showing the world through Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection.

In this manner, God loved the world, that ALL might come within god's embrace.

And what manner is that?

A life of love.

A life that met the curious like Nicodemus at night and answered his questions,

A love that met the socially excluded like the Samaritan woman that we will hear about next week,

A love that met the antagonistic scribes with grace and humor, and those who were threatened by Jesus (even Pilate and Herod) a manner of life that includes rather than excludes.

A manner of life that invites rather than casts out.

A manner of life that hears the brokenness in the midst of angry words and looks beyond those angry words to seek new beginnings and transformation rather than destroying community.

A way of life that engages not just our minds but our hearts and hands.

In this manner, Nicodemus, God loves us and we are to live.

In this manner God has loved God's people into community, from wandering in the wilderness to the heart of the city of Boston.

Each day inviting us to find a way to re-imagine how to love in the manner that God has first loved us into who we are.

“What is the way?” Thomas will ask this later in the Gospel of John. Again, Jesus says- my life here shows you the way, the how, the root of each day.

Love.

This manner of love is a different way, different from simply taking a job and getting promoted, achieving success in society's eyes.

This manner of love invites you at the end of the day to sit with Jesus and look at the loving embrace that God has given both to you and to those around you.

You, too, are invited into conversation in the midst of the stillness and quiet of the night to ask your deepest questions of “why” and “for how long” and “what do you mean?”

Jesus says to you, as he said to Nicodemus, “You already know.”

In the wind, in the air, in the midst- you have seen my love for you present and deeply WITH you.

God loved the world so much that God is always in the process of restoring us in relationship, All of us, in the most imaginative and sometimes invisible way.

Nicodemus appears for a second time in the gospel of John, at the time of Jesus' death. Nicodemus is one of the men who, in John's Gospel, prepares the body of Jesus for burial- bringing the spices to care for the dead, as one would for a beloved family member. Nicodemus wasn't told to do this action. Rather, out of love, he came to care for this teacher who met him where he was and in turn Nicodemus acted in love for this beloved companion.

As we continue in our journey of Lent, how will you, too, live in this manner of love? Inviting others to walk with you?
Inviting others to know the embrace of Jesus' loving arms?
Caring hearts and hands with arms outstretched?

i

<https://alexaanswers.amazon.com/question/6S9V7cXYW0g0Z5nyb6y3uq#:~:text=this%20game%20is%20centuries%20old,do%20something%2C%20you%20did%20it.>

ii

<https://alexaanswers.amazon.com/question/6S9V7cXYW0g0Z5nyb6y3uq#:~:text=this%20game%20is%20centuries%20old,do%20something%2C%20you%20did%20it.>