



## Second Sunday of the Lent

*The Rev. Glenda Empsall, St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Coeur d'Alene, ID 2020*

Lord, who caused **all** holy Scriptures to be written for our **learning**: Grant us so to **hear** them, **read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest** them, that we may **embrace** and **ever hold fast** the blessed **hope** of everlasting **life**...

This weekend I attended a **workshop** titled, "**Fierce Conversations**." "**Con**" is Latin for "**with**." **Versari** is Latin for "**back and forth**." A "**conversation**" is to go "**back and forth with**." The course promo was, "While **no** single **conversation** is guaranteed to **change** the **trajectory** of a **career**, a **company**, a **relationship**, or a **life**... **any** single conversation **can**." Further in the course description, "...leave feeling **confident** and **empowered** to create **high** levels of **collaboration** and **partnership** in **all** aspects of your **life** and **work**." The workshop gave me **tools** to **have** conversations that I **prefer** to **avoid**. I **thought** I knew what a "**fierce** conversation" **was**, but I would **not** have paired **those** two **words**. I know **shouting** matches, **temper** tantrums and **hissy** fits. I **enjoy** conversations. I loathe **confrontations**, even though the workshop **instructor** was crystal clear: "**confrontation**" is "getting in **front** of an **issue/problem with**" the person with **whom** you are **having** or **preparing** to have a **fierce** conversation.

Nicodemus was a **Pharisee**, an **educated** man, **dedicated** to **observance** of the **law** given by God to **Moses**; the **law** which could be **interpreted** by learned men. **Nicodemus** came to Jesus at **night**. To me that says **Nicodemus** didn't want his fellow **Pharisees** to **know** he was meeting **Jesus**. He wanted to **question** Jesus but he did **not** want to offend or **anger** other **Pharisees** who saw **Jesus** as an **enemy**.

Did Nicodemus **practice** what he would **say**, and **imagine** what Jesus might **reply**? I'll say **this**; Jesus will reply **that** and I will counter with **this**... but I don't think the **conversation** went as Nicodemus **expected**. Jesus did **not** follow the **script** Nicodemus may have **envisioned**.

Nicodemus **began** the **conversation** by expressing his **admiration** for Jesus. “**Rabbi**, we know that you are a **teacher** who has come from **God**; for **no** one can do the signs that **you** do apart from **God**.” Jesus didn’t fall into an **ego** trap. Jesus **sensed** Nicodemus’ desire to **know** and **understand** and so he replied, “... **no** one can see the **kingdom** of God without being **born** from **above**.” Other translations are, “unless someone is born **anew**” or “born **again**.” I think this **complements** The Way of Love word, “**TURN**.” Each day we **begin** with a fresh slate. We **turn** from the **darkness** of night to the **light** of day. We are **renewed**. We are born **again**.

**Nicodemus** said to Jesus, “**How** can anyone be **born** after having grown **old**? Can one enter a **second** time into the mother’s **womb** and be born **again**?” Although a **learned** man, Nicodemus doesn’t the **get** metaphor. **Maybe** Nicodemus was **challenging** Jesus to speak his **truth** more **directly**. **Jesus** responds to **Nicodemus** with **more** metaphor. “...**no** one can **enter** the **kingdom** of God without being **born** of **water** and **Spirit**. What is **born** of the flesh is **flesh**, and what is **born** of the Spirit is **spirit**. ... ‘You **must** be born from **above**.’ The wind **blows** where it **chooses**, and you hear the **sound** of it, but you do **not** know where it **comes** from or where it **goes**. So it is with **everyone** who is **born** of the **Spirit**.” The **wind**, the **spirit**, the **Ruach**, the **breath** of **God**; these are **mysteries** that are **beyond** human **understanding**.

Nicodemus asked, “**How** can these things **be**?” **Jesus** challenged **Nicodemus**, (and maybe was a bit snarky) “**Are you** a **teacher** of Israel, and yet **you** do **not understand** these things? Very truly, I tell you, **we** speak of what we **know** and **testify** to what **we** have **seen**; yet **you** do **not** receive our **testimony**. If I have **told** you about **earthly** things and you **do not** believe, how can you **believe** if I tell you about **heavenly** things? **No** one has **ascended** into **heaven** except the one who **descended** from **heaven**, the Son of **Man**. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, [Numbers 21:8-9] so must the **Son** of **Man** be **lifted** up, that whoever **believes** in him may have **eternal** life.”

**Jesus** and **Nicodemus** had a “fierce **conversation**” ending with two **iconic** verses, John 3:16-17, “**God** so **loved** the world that he **gave** his only **Son**, so that **everyone** who **believes** in him may **not** perish but have **eternal** life. **God** did not send the Son into the world to **condemn** the world, but in order that the **world** might be **saved** through him.”

Poet David Whyte wrote, “**No** one **has** to **change** and **everyone** has to have the **conversation**. When the **conversation** is **real**, the **change** occurs **before** the conversation has **ended**.” We **know** Nicodemus was **changed** by his fierce **conversation** with Jesus because after Jesus’ **crucifixion**, Nicodemus **accompanied** Joseph of Arimathea to **retrieve** and bury Jesus’

**body.** “**Nicodemus**, who had at **first** come to Jesus by **night**, also came, bringing a mixture of **myrrh** and aloes, weighing about 100 pounds. **They** took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.” [John 19:38-40]

O Great **Love**, thank you for **living** and **loving** in us and **through** us. May **all** that we do flow from our deep **connection** with **you** and **all** beings. **Help** us become a **community** that vulnerably **shares** each other’s **burdens**, even when the **conversation** is **fierce**. **Knowing** you are **hearing** us **better** than we are **speaking**, we **offer** our **prayers** in all the holy names of God. **Amen.**