



BREAKING OPEN

Scripture Study

Second SUNDAY OF LENT
2026



Before the Sun rises

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A weekly reflection based on the teachings at St Peter's by the Lake, Paynesville, together with a study guide based on the readings, some liturgical resources RCL Lectionary, and a weekly devotion

Revised Common Lectionary Related

The Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 12.1-4a

Psalm 121

Romans 4.1-5, 13-17

John 3.1-17



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Almighty God,
who seest that we have no power of
ourselves to help ourselves;

Keep us both outwardly in our bodies,
and inwardly in our souls;

that we may be defended from all
adversities which may happen to the body,
and from all evil thoughts which may
assault and hurt the soul;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION

Under the cover of night, a respected teacher named Nicodemus encounters Jesus in a moment that would forever reshape his understanding of faith.

Weaving together the imagery of wind, water, and darkness to illuminate this pivotal Gospel story, Jesus challenges Nicodemus's controlled approach to faith with the idea of being "born from above."

Through vivid seaside metaphors and the powerful symbolism of king tides reshaping familiar shores, we witness Nicodemus's struggle with surrendering control – a struggle that mirrors our own journey of faith.

The sermon reveals how genuine spiritual transformation often unfolds not in dramatic moments, but in small, steady turnings toward the light, like Nicodemus's gradual journey from nighttime seeker to daylight defender of Christ.

Just as the wind blows where it chooses, the Spirit moves in ways we cannot control but must trust, inviting us to embrace a faith that's received rather than earned.

This Lenten season challenges us to release our grip on certainty and allow ourselves to be carried by a love that's already been given, finding our help not in control but in the One who keeps eternal watch.

The name Nicodemus comes from Greek variations of Νικόδημος, which combines Nike ('victory') and Dēmos ('people'), meaning 'victory of the people' or "conqueror of the people."

This meaning aligns with his spiritual journey in the Gospel of John: transitioning from darkness (symbolising secrecy and fear) to light, questioning peers to overcome social pressure, and ultimately witnessing Jesus' burial as a sign of faith triumphing over fear.

His progression from private doubt to openly declaring faith in Jesus amid vulnerability highlights his gradual overcoming and triumph.

As we walk lightly on sacred ground,
teach us Lord to make known your kingdom,
and let this reflect in all that we do and say.

Before the Sun Rises

The city is quiet.

Jerusalem is holding its breath between yesterday's certainties and tomorrow's rumours. Lamps burn low. Cool stone presses gently beneath bare feet. The scent of dew lingers in the air. Footsteps echo softly in narrow streets.

And a man comes walking.

Nicodemus. A Pharisee. A ruler of the Jews. A teacher of Israel.

He does not come as a cynic.

He does not come as an enemy.

He comes as a man who knows his Scriptures and yet senses that something, or Someone, stands before him—someone his learning cannot hold.

He comes by night.

We are often quick to judge that detail. We assume fear. We assume secrecy. Perhaps that is true. But night in John's Gospel is more than cowardice. Night is the place where seeds germinate. Night is where wrestling happens. Night is where Jacob limped into blessing. Night is where the Passover began. Night is where resurrection would one day take root before dawn ever broke.

Sometimes, night is not the absence of faith.

Sometimes it is the beginning.

And Nicodemus speaks with respect:

"Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God."

It is a careful sentence. It leaves room for retreat.

Jesus does not affirm his credentials. He does not debate miracles. He goes directly to the heart:

"Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Born from above. Born anew. Born of the Spirit. Born into a life that only begins when the old certainties give way.

Nicodemus hears impossibility.

"How can anyone be born after having grown old?"

It is a reasonable question. He is not foolish. He is literal. He is grounded. He is a teacher accustomed to careful interpretation. And Jesus is speaking of something that cannot be diagrammed on parchment.

Here is where we must tread carefully.

This is not a demand for emotional spectacle.

This is not a slogan.

This is not a religious badge.

To be born from above is not to achieve a higher spiritual status. It is not self-improvement. It is not the prize for mastering theology.

It is a gift.

Jesus speaks of water and Spirit. Echoes of creation stir beneath the words. In the beginning, the Spirit hovered over the waters. Breath moved over chaos. Life emerged where there had been none.

This is not about starting over by effort.

It is about being breathed into by God.

The wind blows where it chooses. You hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

We know something about wind. We have stood by water before a change rolls in. We have heard it in trees, felt it press against us, watched it disturb what we assumed was settled. We cannot see the wind itself. We see what it moves.

So it is with the Spirit.

The Spirit is not contained by our systems.

Not controlled by our timetables.

Not owned by any party or tradition.

Which is unsettling.

And deeply consoling.

Because if salvation depended on our mastery of it, none of us would stand.

Nicodemus struggles. "How can these things be?"

Jesus' words are not harsh, but they are searching. "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

The question is not meant to humiliate. It is meant to loosen certainty. Nicodemus knows the promises. He knows Ezekiel's vision of clean water poured out. He knows the promise of a new heart, a new spirit placed within God's people. He knows the wilderness story.

And Jesus reaches back there.

"Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

In the wilderness, the people were bitten by what they had complained about. The cure was strange. Not removal of danger. Not immediate comfort. But a bronze serpent lifted high. Healing came not by denial of the wound, but by looking toward what God had raised up.

So must the Son of Man be lifted up.
Here, the Gospel begins to widen.

The lifting up is the cross. Not an accident. Not divine miscalculation. But the place where God enters the wound of the world. Where sin and fear and death are not dismissed but confronted.

And then the words that have echoed through centuries:
“For God so loved the world...”

Not the ideal world.
Not the already-faithful world.
The world.
The anxious world.
The divided world.
The weary world.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son — not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Doctrinal clarity matters here.
Salvation is not human ascent toward God.
It is God’s descent toward us.

Grace is not awarded to the spiritually impressive.
It is given to the beloved.

Eternal life is not merely duration.
It is participation, beginning now, in the life of God.

And then comes the language of light and darkness.
“Light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light.”

We must hear this carefully. Darkness in John is not merely intellectual doubt. It is resistance to exposure. It is the fear that if the light shines fully, we will not survive what it reveals.

But the Gospel does not say that those who struggle are condemned. It says that those who come into the light discover their deeds have been done in God.

The light is not interrogation.
It is a revelation of grace.

And what of Nicodemus?
He fades from the scene in this chapter. No altar call. No dramatic

declaration.

But he appears again. Tentatively defending Jesus in chapter seven. And finally, in chapter nineteen, after the crucifixion, stepping forward in daylight with costly spices to prepare the body.

The man who came by night stands in the open when it matters most.

Faith can begin in darkness.
And grow toward courage.
Perhaps that is where some of us stand.

Not in blazing noon certainty.
Not in triumphant clarity.
But in pre-dawn light.

There is a particular stillness before sunrise. Shapes are visible but not yet defined. You know the light is coming, but it has not yet broken over the horizon.

Some of you may be there.

Still asking.
Still wondering.
Still holding together inherited faith and present questions.

Hear this: Jesus does not reject Nicodemus for coming at night.

He meets him there.

The kingdom of God is not entered by conquering with the mind. It is received. The Spirit is not called by method. It moves.

The Son is lifted up not to shame the wounded, but to heal them.

Selah.

And the dawn does not argue with the night.

It simply arrives.

If you are in pre-dawn light, you are not outside grace. You may be closer to it than you think.

Because the God who loved the world did not wait for daylight to begin the work of salvation.

He began it in darkness.

Discussion Questions

- In the sermon, Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night with questions. What does his nighttime approach symbolise about his spiritual journey, and why might some people still approach faith cautiously today?
- The sermon describes how 'darkness is not only absence. It is where



This five-day devotional will take a wind-driven dive into the sermon from this weekend. We will explore Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus by night, discovering how his journey from darkness into light teaches us about faith, transformation, and surrendering control to God's moving Spirit.

Day 1 John 3:1-8

In this passage, we find Nicodemus, a respected teacher of Israel, coming to Jesus in the cover of night, seeking answers. Jesus introduces the concept of being "born from above," a spiritual transformation that requires surrendering control and allowing oneself to be carried by the Spirit. This encounter marks the beginning of Nicodemus's journey from cautious inquiry to bold faith.

Nicodemus's struggle is one we all face—we hesitate to relinquish control, fearing uncertainty. Yet, Jesus invites us into a new beginning, a rebirth that reshapes our lives. As we follow Nicodemus, we learn that the journey of faith often involves stepping into the unknown with trust in the One who guides us through the night into the light.

- Reflect on a time when you felt called to relinquish control to God. How did it change your perspective?
- What areas of your life do you find difficult to release to God's control?
- How does knowing that God's Spirit moves where it chooses impact your faith journey?
- Pray for the courage to surrender areas of control in your life to God.
- Ask God to reveal new beginnings where you least expect them.

Day 2 John 3:16

"For God so loved the world..." These words are familiar, yet they represent the deep heart of God's unending love for us. Jesus speaks this to Nicodemus, a seeker at the threshold of understanding, illustrating that the journey of faith is not about earning God's favour but receiving His love as a gift.

searching begins. Where questions wait in shadow! Nicodemus comes carefully, reverently, carrying signs he cannot yet interpret.

- When have you felt the need to approach God or explore faith questions privately or cautiously, and what held you back from being more open about your spiritual journey?

The sermon describes being born from above not as adding something to your life, but as surrendering control of it. Why is the idea of surrendering control so challenging for people, especially those who are well-educated or in positions of authority like Nicodemus?

- Nicodemus was a careful teacher of Israel who knew the law and boundaries, but Jesus told him he must be carried, representing a loss of control.
- What areas of your life do you find most difficult to surrender control over to God, and how might holding onto that control be limiting your spiritual growth?

The sermon uses the imagery of wind and tides to describe spiritual transformation. How does this natural imagery help us understand the way God works in our lives?

- Jesus says, 'The wind blows where it chooses...' and the sermon describes how after a king tide, the shore is different, illustrating how change can be both subtle and dramatic.
- Think about a time when God worked in your life in unexpected ways - how did that experience reshape your understanding of faith?

The sermon shows Nicodemus's gradual transformation from a nighttime seeker to someone who eventually publicly honours Jesus at his death. Why is it important to understand that faith development often happens slowly rather than in dramatic moments?

- The sermon notes that 'Faith is rarely dramatic. Growth is often tidal' and describes how Nicodemus's journey to faith happened 'Slowly. Unevenly.'
- Looking back at your own faith journey, what small, gradual changes have led to significant spiritual growth in your life?

The sermon references John 3:16 within the context of Nicodemus's story, describing it as 'not a condemnation' but 'a gift.' How does understanding this verse within its original nighttime conversation change or deepen its meaning?

- The sermon places the famous verse in context: 'While the empire marches loudly through history, Jesus meets a seeker in the night... And then comes the widening horizon: 'For God so loved the world...'
- How does seeing this well-known verse as part of an intimate conversation with a struggling seeker impact how you might share this truth with others who are searching?

This passage invites us to embrace God's love, no longer as sceptics or those hiding in the shadows, but openly and willingly. Just as Nicodemus slowly grows in understanding and eventually steps into the light, so we are called to lean into the promise of God's love, which transforms and guides us through life's uncertainties.

- How does understanding God's love as a gift change your perspective on faith?
- Where in your life do you find it difficult to receive God's love?
- In what ways can you more fully embrace and trust God's love today?
- Pray for a deeper understanding and personal experience of God's love.
- Reflect on moments where you have felt God's love guiding you.

Day 3 Genesis 12:1

Just as God called Abraham to leave his known world and follow a promise unseen, Nicodemus is challenged to trust the unseen movements of the Spirit. Faith often requires us to step out, leaving comfort for a path not marked with certainty but filled with divine promise.

In this journey, we are like travellers navigating between places of clarity and shadowed valleys. The story of Nicodemus reassures us that faith is not about dramatic transformations but about small, faithful steps towards the light. Our faith grows each time we trust the promise over the proof, caring less for control and more for God's guiding presence.

- What fears do you face when called to step into the unknown with faith?
- How can you trust God's promise in areas of your life that remain uncertain?
- What does it mean to you to journey by faith rather than by sight?
- Pray for trust to follow God's calling, especially in the unknowns.
- Ask for patience to walk in faith when the way seems unclear.

Day 4 Psalm 121:1-2

"I lift my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?" Like the psalmist, Nicodemus must learn to look beyond himself to the One who keeps watch, trusting in God's ever-present help. This path of faith encourages us to find security not in control but in surrender to God's faithful vigilance.

Our spiritual journey resembles the ocean's tumultuous tides and calm waters – yet in all, it shapes us. Trusting God requires releasing our hold on what we think we must control and resting upon the assurance that God keeps watch over our lives, guiding us through both storm and calm.

- Where do you currently place your trust for help and guidance?
- How can you better recognise God's presence in both the calm and the storms?
- What practices strengthen your trust in God's watchful care?
- Pray for peace as you surrender your worries to God.
- Ask for eyes to see God's hand in your daily life, especially in challenging times.

Day 5 John 1:5

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." Nicodemus, who first came by night, ended his journey stepping into the light. Likewise, our journey in faith moves from moments of misunderstanding and shadows into clarity and light.

Growth in faith is rarely flashy; it's often a quiet, continual turning towards the light. Like Nicodemus, each small step brings us closer to God's illumination in our lives. Embrace the journey through the darkness, knowing that God's light always prevails, guiding us forward with love already given.

- Reflect on a time when God's light shone through your moments of darkness.
- Where can you offer light to others who are walking in darkness?
- How has your understanding of faith grown over time?
- Pray for continual guidance toward God's light in your daily walk.
- Thank God for the light that has guided you through past trials.

End notes and further reading

End notes and further reading

Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew
Moloney, Francis J, SBD, Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John
Johnson, Luke Timothy: Sacra Pagina: The Gospel on Luke
Collins, Raymond F., Sacra Pagina: First Corinthians
Andrew McGowan substack.com/@abmcg
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A
Andrew Pratt, pastor and hymn writer (twelvebaskets.co.uk)

Let your faith and relationships
be shaped by love and patience
for God's love is
revealed in lives, not letters.



Brabarlung Totem

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