

Holy Love found in the dark

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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Can you imagine with me for a moment: The power has gone out during the wee hours of the night. You wake up in the dark, and begin to feel your way out of your bedroom through the pitch black to your living space, to look out into the road. The streetlights are out. You know that you could fish out the flashlight, but then we decide that we will make the journey on faith. If we already had limited or loss of sight, this journey would be easier, we would be more confident. But fumbling in the dark, you bump your shin on the couch, step on the cat's tail, arms out in front of you, the confidence of faith is more difficult.

I'm going to be honest with you, with every year older I become, I realize it is true, that adage: *the more I learn, the more I learn that I don't know.*

So many times we are challenged to believe things that we cannot see; for Christians, believing that God loves us so much that God would become vulnerable, enfleshed human, and live among us and die modelling that love. Can we believe that God loves Creation enough not to remain a "distant deity", instead God incarnated, enfleshed and walking with us. The word made flesh – John's Gospel creation story in chapter 1.

So take a look at this depiction of Nicodemus¹ meeting Jesus by night. There I might be, a religious leader, like Nicodemus arms out, saying, "Tell me again, Jesus, what am I missing?... Born from *above*?" Nicodemus is muddling in the dark. Afraid, but wanting to learn how to believe, even in the dark.



We will see Nicodemus again in John's Gospel story. In chapter 7², the religious authorities are concerned about things that Jesus is saying. I know of radical clergy who have stirred up controversy, and sometimes we see how we Christians can become less-than-loving.

But Nicodemus, in the inner sanctum among religious elite, says: "Hey, do we judge a person without trying to understand them?"

He appears one more time – after Jesus' death. There, at the end of John's account of the Story of God's Love, enfleshed among us, is Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus tending to the body of Jesus after the crucifixion.³

It was the revelations experienced in the darkness, not in light, that helped Nicodemus to be born anew. Said another way: he learned to love what God loves. Which often,

¹ Nicodemus by Jesus Mafa, <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48385>

² John chapter 7, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+7%3A+37-52&version=NIV>

³ John chapter 19, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+19%3A+31-42&version=NIV>

unfortunately, is not at all the same as what we are taught by our world to love. Our world: success and symbols of success – cars, comfort, titles.

God's love that Jesus teaches us, in contrast, is extended to absolutely everyone - the belligerent family member, the dishevelled stranger on the street, a world still gripped by coronavirus and needing us to stay distanced for longer. But believing, oh believing that there is a promised land. Encouraging that jaded friend on the phone to hang in there, you love them, some day soon I will be able to come over there and give you a hug.

It's hard. So very hard, finding holy love in the darkness.

Where is darkness in your life? The places of uncertainty.

Those aspects of your life, your personality, where when you go there you begin to rant, argue. You are afraid.

That is where God, Jesus, is calling us to feel our way, bang our shin on the coffee table in the dark. But love is there, in the dark, love guiding us more confidently. Until we can realize that no darkness is too great for God, have faith enough in Holy Love to guide us, we might navigate the darkness, and embody love in our journeys.

So there it is. There, perhaps we are, like Nicodemus, bewildered by God's love story with Creation. The ancient Jewish stories of Moses and the Israelites in exile, a very prickly group, not always faithful, but God loved them. Nicodemus with all his authority, learning that his education could not teach him deep-in-the-heart experiential love that Jesus encouraged him to find in the darkness.

In the darkness of Jesus' death, Nicodemus let love lead him. We are invited today, I think, to believe, to know deep down that Holy Love is journeying with us into this week, with its grief, the exhaustion, the frustrations, and the hope. We are led. Even if we feel we are muddling. We are led. Amen.