**Second Sunday in Lent, March 8, 2020, the Rev. David Ota**

**Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17**

In today’s gospel lesson we meet Nicodemus who meets with Jesus in the night. Nicodemus was one of the members of the Sanhedrin who ruled Jerusalem at the time under Roman authority. It is instructive that he came to meet Jesus at night, because he did not want to have his encounter with Jesus to be witnessed by others.

I also read this week, that Nicodemus is a good example for many 21st century Mainline Protestant Christians. We believe and entrust our lives to God in Jesus, but for the most part let our actions speak for us and not our words. In a sense, like Nicodemus we tend to be upstanding citizens of the United States. We follow the social norms and the law. Unlike Jesus we tend not to shake up society.

The Sanhedrin had its eyes on Jesus. He was stirring up the crowds, and thus Nicodemus came to Jesus secretly so his peers would not know. Are we a little like this? Are we hesitant to let others know that we have entrusted our lives to God in Jesus?

On the other hand, you are here at worship today, despite the Department of Health of San Mateo County saying that unnecessary gatherings should be cancelled due to the possible transmission of the Coronavirus, COVID 19. However, the announcement would not define what in necessary or unnecessary and left it up to each group to decide.

Bishop Marc Andrus sent out an email saying that we could continue to gather for worship, but should not offer the worshippers the consecrated wine through the common cup, and that we should offer the consecrated bread in wafer form, instead of home baked bread. In essence for us Episcopalians worship and receiving communion is necessary for us. So those of us who came for worship today find it necessary as part of our Christian identity and witness to gather for Eucharist, to give thanks for our common identity of followers of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, I was told by Nellie Wong that our neighbors, Central Peninsula Church has cancelled worship as a gathering, but will conduct worship through live-streaming. As they are much larger, come from a non-sacramental tradition, and are more focused on the proclamation of the gospel than offering the sacrament, it makes sense for them. However, there may come a time when circumstances may change, and it may be the right thing for us to cancel worship and seek to have a form of worship through live-streaming. If anyone knows how to do this, let me know.

Anyway, getting back to Nicodemus, though at first, he was hesitant to be seen with Jesus in public, he was attracted to Jesus. He said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus responded, “no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born from above.” The phrase “born from above” could also be interpreted as “born again.” And Nicodemus took Jesus’ comment literally and could not understand what he meant. Of course, what he meant was that Nicodemus need to be spiritually born again to have his perspective transformed.

For our Lenten program this year, we are studying the book, The Second Mountain, the Quest for a Moral Life by David Brooks. As part of today’s presentation on Vocation, Brooks talks about the difficulty of making a transformational life decision. He calls these decisions “Vampire Problems” because they fundamentally change who we are when we make them. For example, when we decide to marry a specific person, once we make that decision, we can never go back to being a single unmarried person again, even if we divorce or become a widow or widower. Our life will be fundamentally changed as our marriage commitment will make us part of a larger extended family.

This was Nicodemus’ problem. If he came out publicly as a follower of Jesus, it would affect his standing in his community, and he may have been shunned, and he was afraid to risk it.

Brooks says that making a transformational decision is not a rational decision. We do not make these life altering decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis. We make these life altering decisions based on our heart and soul, seeking to live for a higher purpose.

It would take Nicodemus a while to publicly stand for Jesus. In the gospel of John, Nicodemus appears two more times. Next when the Sanhedrin is trying to have Jesus arrested, he reminds them that their law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing (John 7:50-51), but he could not convince them and was questioned if he was from Galilee like Jesus. So, Nicodemus didn’t come out to defend Jesus.

Finally, after Jesus was crucified and buried by Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus, Nicodemus joined him by bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes for the burial. Nicodemus was finally moved to act and stand for Jesus only after the crucifixion.

The journey of Nicodemus reveals that it was a movement of his heart and soul that caused him to act. Bringing a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes would be public. He would have to risk his position in the Sanhedrin and among the other Pharisees as a Jesus sympathizer by taking this action.

Abram and Sarai too made a transformational decision to follow God’s call to leave their kindred to a new land. The process is not described in today’s text, but it must have been an emotional one to leave their family to follow where the LORD their God would lead. According to the Apostle Paul in today’s lesson in Romans, they made this decision based on faith or trust in God. This life changing decision once again is made with the heart and soul, seeking to be faithful to God’s call.

Our call as Christians is to love God and neighbor. Although our response to God’s call may be made with our heart and soul, it also requires us to use our reason. As I said at the beginning of the sermon, our worship of God is necessary for us as Christians, and our practice of sharing Holy Communion is essential for us. But there may come a time, when it is not the loving thing for us to gather, and we may have to be in quarantine. Currently, we are taking a rational action not to use the common cup.

Also, I have had the conversation with the Vestry and with our Principal Jerelyn Weber that if we have to close the school because of the danger of transmission of the Coronavirus, we will do so while also compensating our staff.

If we must stop gathering for worship to protect the community from the transmission of the Coronavirus, then we will need to find different means to stay united as a worshipping community.

As stated in Psalm 121, our faith is in God who watches over us, keeps us and protects us from evil. Trust in the LORD our God and follow our Lord Jesus to make loving decisions in this fearful time.

Amen.

**I propose to show that like Nicodemus we are called to make transformational decisions to follow God’s lead which is more a decision of the heart requiring us to rethink how we are called to take some risks to love God and neighbor.**

**The Collect**

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.*

**Old Testament**

**Genesis 12:1-4a**

The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him.

**The Response**

**Psalm 121**

***Levavi oculos***

1 I lift up my eyes to the hills; \*  
from where is my help to come?

2 My help comes from the Lord, \*  
the maker of heaven and earth.

3 He will not let your foot be moved \*  
and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.

4 Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel \*  
shall neither slumber nor sleep;

5 The Lord himself watches over you; \*  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand,

6 So that the sun shall not strike you by day, \*  
nor the moon by night.

7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; \*  
it is he who shall keep you safe.

8 The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in, \*  
from this time forth for evermore.

**The Epistle**

**Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”) —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

**The Gospel**

**John 3:1-17**

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, 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. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘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.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “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, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

**In preparation for this coming Sunday’s worship, please pray this coming Sunday’s Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42;**

**The Collect**

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in 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, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Exodus 17:1-7**

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested theLord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

**The Response**

**Psalm 95**

***Venite, exultemus***

1 Come, let us sing to the Lord; \*  
let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.

2 Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving \*  
and raise a loud shout to him with psalms.

3 For the Lord is a great God, \*  
and a great King above all gods.

4 In his hand are the caverns of the earth, \*  
and the heights of the hills are his also.

5 The sea is his, for he made it, \*  
and his hands have molded the dry land.

6 Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, \*  
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

7 For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. \*  
Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

8 Harden not your hearts,  
as your forebears did in the wilderness, \*  
at Meribah, and on that day at Massah,  
when they tempted me.

9 They put me to the test, \*  
though they had seen my works.

10 Forty years long I detested that generation and said, \*  
"This people are wayward in their hearts;  
they do not know my ways."

11 So I swore in my wrath, \*  
"They shall not enter into my rest."

**The Epistle**

**Romans 5:1-11**

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

**The Gospel**

**John 4:5-42**

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”