

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

Sermon March 5th, 2023

God Sent Jesus to Save the World!

In our gospel, Jesus is inviting Nicodemus to look at his beliefs from a different perspective. A perspective that greatly challenges what Nicodemus has believed and taught as a Pharisee.

Now, Nicodemus is interested in what Jesus has to say. He even sneaks off from his peers at night to have a conversation with Jesus. But Nicodemus doesn't know if he can agree with everything Jesus is teaching. Nicodemus doesn't know if he can fully commit to following Jesus. Nicodemus doesn't know if he can even fully understand what Jesus is trying to teach him here.

Nicodemus is pondering whether or not he can walk in this new direction Jesus is inviting him to walk in (**Image One**: someone lost in thought).

We can relate to Nicodemus here. When someone comes along and challenges us to see something we believe in from a different perspective it can be difficult for us to understand, accept, and commit to this perspective. We too ponder whether or not we can walk in this new direction (**Image One**).

We see this unfold when the church has had to make decisions that deal with contemporary issues. Like women ordination, same sex marriages, medical assisted dying, living as a Christian in a pluralist world to name a few.

When someone or a group of people come along and challenge us to see our faith from a new perspective it can be hard for us to hear this invitation (**Image One**). It can be hard for us to accept this invitation. We feel anxiety and fear. We wonder if this new perspective is motivated by God or by society? We wonder if this new perspective, this new direction we are invited to walk in will pave the way for God's saving grace or will it lead to division and heartache?

We too ponder whether or not we can walk in this new direction (**Image One**).

We ponder this when we face issues in the church. We ponder this when we face a transition in our lives.

For example, when we choose to get married, we are choosing to walk in a new direction. Single life and married life are quite different. When we decide to get married, we are challenged to see what matters to us in a whole new way. This

happens again if we choose to have a child. This happens again if we choose to change careers. This happens again when we retire. This happens again when we become grandparents. This happens again when we need to move into an assisted living community.

Often times before we make any major life decision that will change the direction we are walking in; we ponder whether or not we can walk in this direction (**Image One**). Am I ready to settle down? Am I ready to be a parent? Can I change careers? Am I ready to retire? Am I ready to be a grandparent? Though we don't have a lot of control over that last question. Am I really needing more support than my family can give me?

As the church we have asked similar questions when discussing these societal issues. Are we willing to welcome women as leaders in our community? Are we willing to welcome same sex couples in our community? Are we willing to walk with people in dying no matter what the cause of death is? Are we willing to accept people of other faith traditions as people whose beliefs and values are meaningful and reflect God's love in the world?

Are we willing and/or ready to walk in this new direction (**Image One**)?

For Nicodemus, he is struggling with this very question. In response to this question, Jesus doesn't condemn Nicodemus. Jesus is frustrated that Nicodemus can't understand him and choose to follow him fully and completely. But Jesus doesn't condemn Nicodemus.

Instead, Jesus reiterates for Nicodemus, and for all of us, that Jesus has not been sent into the world to condemn it, but to save it. To show us that this new direction Jesus is inviting us to walk in will lead us to experience God's saving grace (**Image Two**: someone on their knees with rays of light shining down on them).

Now, of course there will still be struggle along the way. We see what happens to Jesus. We see what happens to his followers. We see what happens to us as we live in this broken world.

Even if we choose to walk in these new directions, we will still face conflict, suffering. But we will also experience God's saving grace (**Image Two**). We will see God's love at work in people's lives. We will see God's love at work in our lives.

For Nicodemus, he will see God's saving grace at work in Jesus as Jesus heals the sick, raises the dead, welcomes the sinner and the poor.

For us, we will see God's saving grace at work in the church as we welcome those who have been mistreated, as we walk with those who are misunderstood, as we build

partnerships with people of other faiths, so to, feed and clothe the poor living in our communities. As well as create bridges of peace in our world.

For us, we will see God's saving grace at work in ourselves as we share our lives with someone, learning to love them for all of who they are. We will see God's saving grace at work in ourselves as we parent our children, learning to love someone without conditions. We will see God's saving grace at work in ourselves as we learn and grow in something new when changing careers. We will see God's saving grace at work in ourselves as we become a loving neighbour, transitioning from working for money to volunteering in the community. We will see God's saving grace at work in ourselves as we become loving grandparents, learning to share our wisdom, as well as, learning to listen. We will see God's saving grace at work in ourselves as we become cared for by others. Learning to trust more in those we love.

As Jesus states, he has come not to condemn us when we feel anxious and scared. He has come not to condemn us when we fall short of God's invitation for us. Jesus has come to save us. To save the whole world. To give us what we need to walk in this new direction. So to, experience God's saving grace in our own lives, and in the lives of others as we live out our calling as Christ's disciples (**Image Two**).

Let us pray, gracious God, you challenge us with Jesus' words and actions to walk in new directions. Calm our fears and anxieties. Give us hope and trust that in these new directions we will see and experience your saving grace. **Amen.**

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