

**Act As We Believe**  
**The Rev. Deacon Lisa Kirby**  
**March 12, 2017**

Let us pray

May we have such an awareness of God's mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth his praise, not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to HIS service, by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives.

This week and next we have two stories about people who encounter Jesus in somewhat unusual ways. Next week we will look at the story of the woman who encountered Jesus at the well where she had gone to draw water and to whom He revealed his true identity. This week we will talk about Nicodemus.

The Gospel According to John is the only gospel containing the story of Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, which is the Jewish Court before whom Jesus would be taken. It would have been dangerous for him to come to Jesus by the light of day, so he sneaks out in the darkness, approaches Jesus, and respectfully calls him Rabbi/ teacher. After they speak, he goes back into the darkness.

We see him again for the last time when he and Joseph of Arimathea come, and again it's after dark, on Good Friday to take Jesus body and prepare it with spices and to take it to be buried in the tomb. Even then we do not really know to what extent he has affirmed Jesus identity as the Messiah And, if he did, we don't know if he was ever able to proclaim his savior in public.

Echoing part of the Great Thanksgiving there is a collect that asks that what we believe in our hearts, we may proclaim with our lips and show forth in our lives

We don't know if Nicodemus was ever able to proclaim with his lips or show forth in his life what he seems to have believed in his heart.

At the 2015 General Convention of the Episcopal Church there were badges saying "Believe Out Loud"!! Nicodemus did not dare believe out loud. I'm not labeling Nicodemus as a hypocrite. It was just not safe. He did what he had to do to stay alive.

We just prayed that we show forth God's praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives. Nicodemus could not do that. In other words, Nicodemus, in public, could not be true to what he believed in private. But we *can be* and we are called to do just that.

Believing Out Loud, the thing that Nicodemus could not do means matching our words and our actions with what we say we believe.

Can we pledge to be the same people in in the light of day, as we are within ourselves. Jesus talks about the hypocrites who pray aloud in public and then oppress their fellow man... Friends, if we speak what we believe in our hearts and do not show it forth in our lives we are hypocrites!

When we proclaim with our lips openness and acceptance for all, and then, in another setting, talk about “those people”, laugh at sexist or racist jokes, engage in gossip and character assassination we are being hypocritical. We are NOT showing forth in our lives what we claim to believe in our hearts. Surely we must strive to be the same no matter who we’re with. Surely we should strive not to have the sort of disconnect Nicodemus had to have, depending on who he was with.

I cringe when I see famous Preachers who proclaim Jesus and a God of love with their words, and then condemn whole groups of people who were created by the same all loving God as they were. We live at a time where thousands of God’s people cannot openly be who they are; we have American citizens of foreign ancestry, in fear of attack or discrimination.

Jewish Centers are being attacked and bombed in record numbers.

Just last night South Dakota passed a law permitting discrimination against mixed race families, mixed faith families and LGBT families.

Sadly one of the challenges we face in trying to be consistent and loving in all circumstances is that many of us have inner turmoil, old or new hurts and wounds that just bubble over at times, causing us to occasionally strike out at others, even members of our own families, or to fail to speak up for others.

Lent is a perfect time to look inward at the things which block our inner peace and make it difficult to work and communicate peacefully with those around us.

As we have been pointing out, Lent is frequently the time when we chose to make our confession, The Reconciliation of A Penitent it’s called in our prayer book. In recovery, we call this “clearing up the wreckage of the past”. Perhaps this is the year you will want to make an appointment with one of the clergy to do that in preparation for Easter. When Easter comes, we will have lighter hearts when we make those wonderful Easter Proclamations.

We will be better able to speak out of our wholeness and health, not out of our brokenness. Our brokenness, our inner wounds keep us from being able to be true to our faith in all our doings. It can cause us to inflict OUR pain on others.

May we do whatever it is that we need to do so that our words and deeds are always reflections of the love of Christ in our hearts. Unlike, Nicodemus, may we be given the courage gained from the knowledge of the love and strength of Christ Jesus, to speak and to act as we say we believe, no matter where we are.

May we Believe out loud, praise out loud, laugh out loud, raise our voices in support of those who face injustice and deprivation, and may we always work to be able speak in compassion and peace to our brothers and sisters in Christ, to our families, and to those around us in this world and in this Christian community.

May we, again in the words of the General Thanksgiving have such an awareness of God’s mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth his praise, not only with our lips but in our lives. Amen

