

## **The Here and Now --- in Light of Eternity**

In 1926 a young Englishwoman, Joanna Field, began to feel that she was not living a truly authentic life, that she did not know what made her truly happy. To remedy this she kept a journal in order to discover what specifically triggered the feeling of delight in her daily life. The journal, *A Life of One's Own*, was published in 1934. Through this project she discovered that she delighted in red shoes, good food, sudden bursts of laughter, reading in French, answering letters, loitering in a crowd at a fair and "a new idea when it is grasped."

Nicodemus was highly respected; he lived his life in a responsible, faithful manner. Yet one could imagine that perhaps he felt something was missing. That there was emptiness which achievement, authority and experience did not fill. This may have been what led him to Jesus in the dark of the night. He may have felt much like that young Englishwoman, that his life was less that he somehow was not what he was meant to be. Nicodemus saw what he understood to be signs of the workings of God, yet not in the way he expected.

Perhaps Nicodemus did not know what he delighted in, or how to separate the experience of God's power and grace from the means and vehicles to which he was accustomed. It is a struggle in ministry, to find obedience and purpose in the sharing, inviting and encouraging, rather than looking for results, measurable, namable results for those of us who are type A. There is a unique challenge in striving to live in the will and way of God, when God's will and way are far beyond our understanding and predicting.

Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus, I believe, was a way of his being still and seeking to know God more fully. Many experience those times when it seems like something is slightly out of focus, where what we are is not quite what we yearn to be. On this day I invite you not to focus on the conversation, as wonder-filled and perhaps complex as it is, but to ask yourself what would cause you to step away from your life to question – to question some of the basic understandings that shape your life.

We are living in a time where life has that out of focus that what happening in not quite what is supposed to be happening quality. The economy is affecting many. As groceries, gas and utilities climb at a rate that becomes harder and harder to ignore, many are finding that the level of financial "comfort" they have achieved is being eroded. This eroding is not a sudden drop, it can be much like that sense of Nicodemus that things are not just as was expected, or like the young Englishwoman, that delight and joy just seem to be less and less a reality of daily living.

There was an article in the St. Louis paper about the change over the last few months for restaurants and those employed by them. Perhaps it caught my attention because Jenna is a "server" at Ruby Tuesday's, or perhaps because it seems to capture what can evolve when we are not taking time to stop, seek God and take stock of how we are living and what choices we are making. T

he article stated that restaurants in this area have seen two changes as inflation has made it's climb. One is that some of the regulars are not as regular as before, that they are cutting back on the number of times they are eating out. The other is that some have not changed their habits, but are tipping less to offset the rising prices in their lives.

One choice affects the individual, reshapes priorities and adjusts to the changing reality. The other puts the burden of the change on "an other", with little thought to what impact it may have, or how it may compound in their lives the changing reality that all are experiencing. This small example is much like when those in positions of power and authority, regardless of the arena, become isolated or carry a world view that is based only on their own comfort or desires.

It is much like Nicodemus may have been, wanting to see and celebrate the workings of God, yet wanting those workings to come in ways that affirm his understanding and position. What might we each discover if we were to step away in the dark of night, to open ourselves to what

God might wish to reveal? I suspect it may be a confusing as the conversation in today's scripture or call us to prayer, to prayer which will change us rather than request changes in situation, circumstance or other, as the reading in James does. What might we see if we examined the currently reality in our lives against what we understood or expected, especially in light of how we see the promises of God played out or falling short.

Might we too, be invited to be "born again" to see with new eyes and to experience new life? Might we find that our delight is firmly anchored to our desire to show care and consideration for others, for "others" unknown or easily ignored. Where might we find that God is working, that the spirit is blowing, that does not fit in with our expectations. What might be waiting for us at the table, and in the dark of night when we step away from life and into the presence of God?