

**Christchurch Rayleigh – Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022, led by John Amos**

For those unable to attend church and do not have access to watch via live-streaming:

**Opening Hymn – Praise my soul the King of heaven**

Praise my soul the King of Heaven, to His feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like thee His praise should sing?  
Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him  
Praise the everlasting King!

Praise Him for His grace and favour, to our fathers in distress;  
Praise Him still the same for ever, slow to chide and swift to bless.  
Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him  
Glorious in His faithfulness.

Father like He tends and spares us, well our feeble frame He knows;  
In His hands He gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes.  
Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him  
Widely has His mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore Him. Ye behold Him face to face;  
Sun and moon bow down before Him, dwellers all in time and space;  
Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Him  
Praise with us the God of Grace!

**Family Time - Who was Nicodemus?**

**Pharisee** - Jewish separatist party emerged largely out of the group of scribes and sages, who believed in strict adherence to the laws of Judaism

**Member of the Sanhedrin** - assemblies of elders, who were appointed to sit as a tribunal in every city in the ancient Land of Israel.

**Religious and devout** – beliefs included, the afterlife, free will and predestination, importance of debate.

We understand that Nicodemus was a wealthy man, who was open minded, and spiritually aware that there is more to life than the physical and material aspects.

This and the concept of an afterlife brought the Pharisees into conflict with other groups such as the Saducees

**Let’s try to precis Nicodemus and then see if there are aspects that we can identify with – score yourself 1 – 10**

**A religious person?** \_\_\_\_\_

**A seeker? Is there more to life...?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Open minded – willing to listen to opinions of others?** \_\_\_\_\_

**A pillar of society?** \_\_\_\_\_

Nicodemus is best known for his late night visit to see Jesus, which we will look at later.

It is fair to say that Nicodemus was a ‘seeker’ and I believe that every seeker has a deep feeling that there must be something more to life, a great truth to be discovered.

I have read that Nicodemus is a model of faith and courage for all Christians to follow.

**Let’s pray..**

**Father God, we thank you that you have given us a rich history of your people throughout the ages. This morning we are thinking about Nicodemus, the person, the seeker, and we thank you for him.**

**Through our thoughts about him, and how we may identify with him in various ways, we come to you now – as Nicodemus came to you, and ask that you will meet with us, listen and answer, and empower us to follow you more closely in our daily lives.**

**Amen**

**Hymn: Seek ye first the Kingdom of God**

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness

And all these things shall be added unto you

Allelu, alleluia!

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word

That proceeds from the mouth of God

Allelu, alleluia!

As and it shall be given unto you, seek and ye shall find

Knock and the door shall be opened unto you

Allelu, alleluia!

**Offetory – prayer for children as they leave for their departments**

**Prayers of Intercession – Duty Elder**

**Hymn: And can it be**

And can it be that I should gain, and interest in the Saviours blood?

Died he for me, who caused his pain, for me, who Him to death pursued?

Amazing Love! How can it be, that thou my God, shouldst die for me?

Tis mystery all, the immortal dies! Who can explore his strange design?

In vain the first born seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine.

Tis mercy all! Let earth adore, let angel minds enquire no more.

He left His fathers throne above, so free so infinite His grace,  
Emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
Tis mercy all, immense and free, for O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature's night  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose went forth and followed thee!

No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in him is mine!  
Alive in him, my living head and clothed in righteousness divine.  
Bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown through Christ my own!

**Reading: John 3 : 1 – 17 (please keep your Bible open and follow)**

Address:

Well, it's a very well known story – our friend Nicodemus visiting Jesus late at night and like me, you, us, we seek wisdom and knowledge from our teachers, especially if they come from God!

But Nicodemus doesn't start the conversation with a question, but a statement. He like many others have seen and witnessed Jesus at work – preaching, teaching, healing – and so Nicodemus says **(verse 2)** “no one could perform signs you are doing if God were not with him”

Look very closely at **verse 3** – Jesus cuts through the outer layers, what people have seen and heard, and he speaks to the inner being of Nicodemus, who we, and **he knows is a seeker**:

Read **verse 3** – the key word here is **“SEE”** – no one can see the Kingdom of God

What is the **'Kingdom of God'** – a place, a time where the creator God, the father of our Lord Jesus, is the King, above all other gods and dieties – **His Kingdom!**

And Jesus says, unless you are **'born again'** Nicodemus, you **cannot SEE** it!

Nicodemus, like many, does not understand and Jesus explains, using the next key word

**"ENTER":**

Read **verse 5** – unless they are **born of water and the Spirit**.

Today, we are aware of the philosophy and meaning of **baptism – Jesus identifying himself** with us, through his baptism – the physical washing away of our sinful nature.

But, Jesus is taking us a stage further, **baptism by the Spirit**, which I believe to be His Spirit!

How can this be, said Nicodemus?

Please look at the words of Jesus in **verse 12** – I have spoken to you of **earthly things** and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of **heavenly things**?

Let's pause for a moment, and think back to the exercise we did earlier – how did you relate and identify with Nicodemus?

**Are you a seeker?** Do you believe (although unable to prove) in the after life?

If so, then I believe Jesus is speaking to you, and me, today!

Please look with me at the words of Jesus in **verse 8** (read) **The wind blows....**

What is Jesus saying?

The wind is a **symbol of freedom...**

**His Spirit is free**, it is not constrained by rituals and religion – it is free, like the wind, and people, like myself, adopt the label of **'free spirit'** – not a free spirit to do what I want, but to seek and do the will of our Lord Jesus.

Let's now return to **verse 3** – no one can **see** the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.

Could Jesus be saying, if you are **constrained by the chains of ritual and religion, of the power of the world**, you **cannot see His Kingdom?**

At this point, words from that wonderful hymn, written by Charles Wesley came to mind... "And can it be" (No 366 R&S) v4 long my imprisoned spirit lay... my chains fell off... I rose, went forth, and followed thee!

**What does being 'born again' mean? To be set free!**

But freedom, to **rely on our faith and trust in Jesus**, can be scary!

Is it not better/easier to have parameters set for us, to be told what to do, to say, to think, to believe?

The answer to that question may be in the affirmative, but think back to what Jesus has said to us this morning:

Twice he uses the phrases – **very truly**.... (he is emphasising the importance)

He says, **(verse 3)** you will **not be able to see** the Kingdom of God, either in the here and now, or in the after life, if you are not set free (born again)

and, again..

He says, **(verse 5)** you will **not be able to enter** the Kingdom of God.

If this language, from our Lord Jesus sounds strong/harsh, please look at the words we read earlier in **verses 16 and 17 (read)**

These are not words of condemnation, but love! Since the beginning of creation, we human beings have been given the gift of **'free will'** – the gift of freedom is there for **everyone** to accept – as the gospel says, **whoever** believes....

### **Let us pray (prayers of reflection)**

Father God, we have listened to your word today and our hearts and souls have been searched.

Many issues have been raised and we seek your forgiveness for the times when our wills have been habit bound and slow!

Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, taught us how to pray, in the words that we have memorised since childhood. By the power of your Holy Spirit, change our lives as we pray...

Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen

### **Closing hymn – I am a new creation**

I am a new creation, no more in condemnation, here in the grace of God I stand!

My heart is over-flowing, my love just keeps on growing, here in the grace of God I stand!

And I will praise you Lord, yes I will praise you Lord, And I will sing of all that you have done.

A joy that knows no limit, a lightness in my spirit, here in the grace of God I stand!

### **Benediction**

Let us say the Grace to each other:

The Grace of our Lord, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

be with us all, ever more,

Amen