

# Second Sunday in Lent

## SCHOLAR VERSUS SAVIOR

John 3: 1-17

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## Analysis by Robin Morgan

3Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2He 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." 3Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4Nicodemus 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?" 5Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8The 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." 9Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 11"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. 12If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal

life. 16“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. 17“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.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Beyond the Debate**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Under Cover of Darkness*

Nicodemus was a scholar and a man of power as a member of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling body of Israel. He comes to Jesus by night. No one needs to see him, no one needs to know. The Nicodemuses of the world may realize that Jesus has something that they want to explore further, but preferably without arousing the interest and disdain of his colleagues. As all good scholars who know how to play the game, Nicodemus starts the conversation with professional flattery. “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” (v. 2).

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Exposed*

Jesus joins the conversation with Nicodemus, but refuses to talk on Nicodemus’s terms. Instead, Jesus challenges him and his presumptions: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above” (v. 3). Nicodemus counters, as any experienced scholar would, by attacking the logic of Jesus’ statement. “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” (v. 4).

Jesus again refuses to be baited into a scholar’s debate, knowing much more is at stake, Nicodemus’ eternal life. “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" (vv. 5-8).

Finally, Nicodemus' heart is exposed, (v. 9): "How can these things be?"

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Condemned to Darkness***

Theological debate has never saved anyone. Jesus makes it utterly clear that God has provided a way out of the darkness, yet people turn away. "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed" (vv. 19-20).

## **PROGNOSIS: Light for All**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Lifted Up on the Cross***

John tells us through Jesus' own words of God's ultimate intentions for those who turn to darkness and what it cost both the Father and the Son. "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" (vv. 14-17).

The Father sent the Son into the world, to be the Light of the world that no darkness can, ultimately, overcome.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Made Whole***

The Nicodemuses of the world, or any of the rest of us, need never walk in darkness again when we trust God's actions in Jesus Christ and turn to the Light. He has taken our darkness and given us his own brilliant Light that warms us and opens our eyes to the new creation reality that God prepared for us from before the foundation of the world. We can trust him because we know how far God's love for us drove him—to the cross to be lifted up, to die and be raised again so that we can share in his Love and his Light.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Testify to the Light***

As the Light of Christ begins to shine in our lives, we become a reflection of that Light and Love for the rest of the world. "But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" (v. 21). We can be beacons for those who still are huddled in the darkness, offering them the Word that was given so graciously and mercifully to us. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (1:14).