



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION**  
**SUNDAY 30 MAY 2021 – Trinity Sunday**

**COLLECT**

Holy God,  
faithful and unchanging:  
enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,  
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,  
that we may truly worship you,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Psalm 29**

- 1 Ascribe to the Lord, you powers of heaven, ◆  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- 2 Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name; ◆  
worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.
- 3 The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;  
the God of glory thunders; ◆  
the Lord is upon the mighty waters.
- 4 The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation; ◆  
the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice.
- 5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; ◆  
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;
- 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf ◆  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.
- 7 The voice of the Lord splits the flash of lightning;  
the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; ◆  
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
- 8 The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe  
and strips the forests bare; ◆  
in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'
- 9 The Lord sits enthroned above the water flood; ◆  
the Lord sits enthroned as king for evermore.
- 10 The Lord shall give strength to his people; ◆  
the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

## **Isaiah 6: 1-8**

<sup>1</sup>In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup>And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." <sup>4</sup>At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." <sup>8</sup>Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

## **John 3: 1-17**

### **Jesus Teaches Nicodemus**

**3** Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. <sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.<sup>[a]</sup>"

<sup>4</sup> "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit<sup>[b]</sup> gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup> You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You<sup>[c]</sup> must be born again.' <sup>8</sup> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.

<sup>10</sup> "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup> Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we

have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. <sup>12</sup> I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? <sup>13</sup> No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>14</sup> Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>15</sup> that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”<sup>[g]</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

### **Reflection- this week from Hannah**

In today's reading we read of Israel's teacher- Nicodemus. He appears three times in John's Gospel, and the third time we encounter him he is helping to put Jesus' body into the tomb- he is in the depths of it. He, with Joseph of Arimathea, was prepared to step into the most hideously tragic and painful moment, remain in it, alongside it, and be a minister of love in that most desperate hour. What journey had brought him to that point, and where might our journeys with Jesus take us?

Well, back in the early moments of John's gospel, Nicodemus visits Jesus 'at night'. Time connectives are deeply symbolic in John's descriptions. They communicate subtly something about the tone of the tale we are invited into at that point. So Nicodemus is in the dark. His darkness, it is initially made clear, is to do with a lack of understanding. On paper, Nicodemus looks great. He is learned. He is born into what perhaps he sees as a favoured identity- at the heart of the community of Israel, part of the religious elite. Nicodemus knows deeply 'the law' that Paul is talking about in our reading from Romans. If anyone is an expert on Judaism and the Messianic hope, it's him. But he is in the dark.

In exploring faith with Nicodemus, Jesus exposes the illusions that those with power and influence have about the nature and purpose of the expected messiah. All of Nicodemus' qualifications are, it turns out, irrelevant. Instead, Jesus says, Nicodemus needs to be 'born again of water and the Spirit'. That perhaps sounded confusing and intimidating at first- Nicodemus was certainly nonplussed to hear Jesus' assertion. But, Jesus' words are full of hope and freedom. It is freedom from the identities we're born in to and scripts it is assumed we'll enact- Jesus' offer of re-birth is for all of us, not just for

those who have been born with certain privileges- like Nicodemus. It's a challenge too, to recognise the difference between knowing about faith, and having faith. Nicodemus *knows* it all, but he also senses that this is not the point.

So, the darkness that surrounds this depth encounter does represent Nicodemus' ignorance. The darkness though, is multifaceted. It also makes us think of secrecy. Perhaps Nicodemus came at night because he dared not ask these questions in the openness of daytime. Jesus' message was, and is, radical, because it shames the abuse of power and instead puts the state of our hearts as fundamental. This was a threat to the religious elite because rules are easy to impose and regulate; whereas 'faith' as a concept, is much less tangible. As one writer puts it:

'The gospel reveals the tensions that exist between certitude and power on one side, and littleness, openness and love on the other. Between being a teacher who knows, and a disciple who is open and searching. The answer Jesus gives us is this: we cannot be good shepherds and teachers unless we are reborn in the Spirit and allow ourselves to be led by God- open to the new ways of God and truly open to people. This means that we are dying to our own ego and our need to be in control, but also to our need to rebel and prove ourselves.'

That loss of control is an invitation to enter into the enduring mystery of Jesus. We are called to trust, and we don't always understand. There is an element to our faith that's always in the dark. The dark in this story (thirdly) also represents the mystery of life as a disciple. There is a beautiful verse in Psalm 139- 'The darkness and the light, they are both alike to thee'. God is at home in all circumstances, and there is something about our pilgrimage, about our rebirth in the Spirit that increasingly enables us to be at home in both the darkness and the light as well. Which draws us onwards to the death of Christ where we find Nicodemus at home, not in literal night time, but as a companion to our saviour in the darkest of times. What began as a strange small-hours conversation, finds its fulfilment in the small, yet profoundly moving account of two men who cared about giving dignity to the body of someone who died the most shameful and humiliating death- a death that made no sense, that was about the furthest thing from a messianic victory that anyone could imagine.

For us who follow Jesus today, as then, the path is one of many, many Spiritual re-births. There may be a moment we can identify as a conversion moment to our faith, or there may not, it doesn't matter- what matters is that we recognise that knowing about Christianity and its tenets is not the fundamental thing. The fundamental thing is the

state of our heart, and our willingness to let the Holy Spirit re-birth us- in baptism once only for eternity, but in confession and in other ways we are continually invited to turn to the light, to let something die and let God birth something life-giving in us again and again and again. It's a gradual thing. There is a stunning line penned by Leonard Cohen- 'bless the continuous stutter, of the word being made into flesh'. That's our pilgrimage- to be, bit by bit, transformed into the likeness of Christ. And in God's strength, not our own, we will find ourselves able to stand in the darkest of mysteries and hold on to hope.