

Nicodemus – Reflective Worship – Sunday 3rd July

I remember the first time I saw him.

I had heard plenty beforehand. Being a Pharisee and being on the Council I got to hear about all of these would be Messiah figures. Mostly they were in the news for a week or two and then disappeared as people began to see through them. To recognise them as the fools they were.

But this Jesus was different. Or at least it seemed that way to me.

The crowds showed no indication of dwindling. More people seemed to be talking about him everyday. Have you heard ... Have you seen ... Did you know...

So I thought it would be worth finding out a bit more first hand.

Of course I couldn't tell the others on the Council that I was going to do this. They were doing all they could to shut him up. The things he was saying and doing threatened all their authority and power. Mine too I guess, but there was something about what I was hearing and I needed to know more.

So I went at night. I had no real plan, I just wanted to know more. Who was this Jesus?

The strange thing was that as I came close to where he was it seemed like he was expecting me. But I had told no one what I was doing!

And we started talking. Now I'm one of those people who think in facts, not images or pictures. So when he spoke of the need to be born again, to be born from above I couldn't understand what he was on about. He must have thought I was some kind of village idiot when I said in my confusion How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?

You know how some things you say keep coming back to you and you wonder how stupid you were to say them.

He then went on to talk about the difference between flesh and spirit and the need to be born of the Spirit. I couldn't grasp what he was saying. There was clearly some deep truth here but it all seemed hidden from me. I queried it, but then he acted surprised that a member of the Council couldn't understand what he was saying.

Later I began to realise that he was talking about himself - he called himself the Son of man – a phrase borrowed from the book of Daniel. He talked of believing in him; of receiving eternal life and about him being the light that has come into the world.

I left him, wondering about all this. Was it true – in which case it would turn everything I knew and believed upside down- or was he another misguided attention seeker.

Time went by. He continued to attract crowds. I wanted to find out more, but I couldn't bring myself to admit to the others on the Council how much he fascinated me. Could it be that he really was the long promised Messiah?

Occasionally I joined at the back of a crowd, covering my face so no one could recognise me, as I strained to hear what he was saying.

His name came up many times at Council meetings. What should we do about him? Should we arrest him? Can we get him out of the way?

I remember at one of those meetings I said *surely we don't judge people without giving them a fair hearing do we?* They all turned and looked at me. One of them made a sly remark about me being one of his followers too. Perhaps I should be more careful.

But I couldn't let it rest. That conversation we had kept coming back to me. The signs he was doing; the authority in his teaching. I remember some of the others on the council plotting all kinds of schemes to trick him; to try to get him to say something that would make arrest easier. But he saw right through them.

Should we pay taxes to Rome – they said. Would he be law abiding or would he urge opposition to Rome. And to answer them he picked up a coin – whose

picture is this? Caesars they said. Well give to Caesar what is his and to God what is Gods.

And then that incident with the woman. Caught in adultery (so they said). Should she be stoned according to the law. He preached love and forgiveness, but also claimed to uphold the law. They thought they had him here. Let the one of you without sin throw the first stone – he said. And of course the Council members knew the law, and knew deep down they were sinners too so they walked slowly away defeated again.

I could sense things were reaching a head. Jesus had come to Jerusalem and would clearly be in the city for the Passover. The crowds were still following him; more each day. I tried to keep my interest in what he was saying quiet. When it was safe, I made sure I was near to where he was. In the temple; walking through the market place; always on the edge of things. Looking disinterested, but hanging on every word. It was a dangerous time. All I had worked for and studied for would be ruined if I was found out. But I couldn't stop listening. I needed to know more about what he was saying. I needed to understand.

The day he threw all the money changers out of the temple sticks in my mind. *You've made my father's house into a den of thieves* he said. And it slowly dawned on me that he was right. The temple was no longer about worshipping God, it was all about power, money and authority. And I was part of it all. At its heart. Part of the problem.

The more I thought about it, the more I knew what I should do, but the harder the thought of doing it became. Could I really give up all this? What if I was wrong about him? So I continued sitting on the fence. Living in one world, but with my heart in another. It was tearing me apart.

And then I heard that the High Priests had had him arrested. He was on trial before Pilate. They hadn't consulted me, hadn't told me – I was sure they knew now where my sympathies lie. But I still couldn't bring myself to admit it.

I was in bits when I heard that he had been sentenced to death, but felt I had to be there to see it. I don't know why, I just knew I must be there. So I cautiously made my way to the crucifixion site.

I could barely look.

When I saw that he had died I turned to walk away, tears welling up inside me. I almost didn't care if I was noticed now, which was strange as the one whose teaching had changed my life was now dead. What could I do.

It was when I saw Joseph of Arimathea ask if he could take Jesus's body to be buried that the idea came to me. If Joseph – another well known and influential character - had come out into the open then so could I.

With a feeling of utter liberation as all the worries and concerns and uncertainties of the last few weeks seemed to fall from my shoulders I ran to my home and gathered some spices and perfumes to anoint his body. I rushed to find Joseph, not caring who saw me now, and did the last thing I could do for this man who had changed my life.

At that point I had no idea what the future would hold

My life as one of the great and good on the Council was over. But my new life had begun. My life as a follower of Jesus. I had been born again!