

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

March 1, 2026



SECRET

the internal conflict of an open faith

by Drew Downs

On Ash Wednesday, we read a gospel about giving and praying in secret to a God who communicates in secret. And then we get very public encounters in our Sunday gospel readings. Including a story of a Pharisee named Nicodemus who visits Jesus in secret. These stories complicate our vision and the common tendency many might have of creating rules for how one might always behave. How one might give and pray and communicate with other people.

This story complicates such rules we discern from scripture, including ones given by Paul to go to others in secret. Not because we should make everything public but because we hide things in secret, in the darkness. This can include our true selves.

Much of what is kept secret distorts the truth, often to persuade others, or even ourselves. Hiding behind the veil of anonymity, we can be anything. Just not who we really are.

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

A Broken Record

I sometimes feel like a broken record. Saying the same things again and again. Too predictable. Not, I suppose, as predictable as the former Presiding Bishop who was the subject of a Bingo card made by fans of what he is likely to preach with "love" as the free space in the center. But maybe in the same basic ballpark. We're going to talk about the things we read about in the gospel and some of those themes run throughout the whole book. Love for sure. Listening to Jesus, yes. The primacy of the threat to the children of God is power and wealth. Yeah . . . that's the one.

There is something to be said, however, for the volume of what Jesus speaks to in the gospels. To look at what Jesus spends most of his time dealing with and it isn't the stuff we associate with Christian piety. Most of it involves living in and working with a world that isn't in alignment with the dream of God – and how beautiful it would be if it were. He talks about that possibility and teaches his students to live like it is already here.

He also confronts the people who are keeping the distortion present: primarily those who preside over the injustice and inequity or defend it, who personally gain from exploiting their neighbors and hamper the blessed community.

And at the center of all of this is wealth and power. Literally money and politics. All of this is easily three-quarters of the gospel. And its important to remember this at a time when our politics is volatile and we are looking for how to be within it. The gospel has a lot to say to us now. Especially when it sounds like we've heard it before.

With love,
Drew+

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FOR SUNDAY

Lent 2A

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Collect

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He 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." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus 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?" Jesus answered, "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." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

"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. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly

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things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 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.”

Reflection

Nicodemus is a religious leader. He has wisdom — historical, theological, biblical — and training. He is part of a network of spiritual gurus who help guide the faithful on their spiritual journeys. He is one of the most respected figures in Judea. But he is alone in coming to Jesus. Afraid to be seen. Why?

In one sense, it is quite obvious — it could be politically problematic for him. That we get this instinctively is quite revealing. Because we are almost too understanding of this. Which is also revealing about us. That we allow it to be so normal. To hide our questions, our curiosities, our relationships. Or that we expect our leaders to be duplicitous and dishonest, to hide negotiations and intentions. Or their real selves.

But people are beginning to flock to Jesus. It isn't yet politically dangerous to be associated with him. Perhaps the more glaring thing to note is that this fear is self-imposed. That he fears the effect on his reputation. Like a therapist having a therapist. This, as any therapist will tell you, is the hubris of perceived perfection. That there is nothing more important for the healer than to receive healing, for the wise than to learn, for the life bringer than to be alive. Perhaps his fear is all on him.

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