

Why was Nicodemus sneaking about in the middle of the night in order to see Jesus? Was he a coward? Was he a spy?

I don't think he was a spy, but he could have been interpreted as one. I don't think he was a coward, but he had a reason for being cautious. It was just a few hours before that Jesus had gone through the temple with whipcords, destroying the vendor tables and making his displeasure known.

Who knew what Nicodemus could have walked into?

Was Jesus still having a temper tantrum, deservedly so?

Did he drop the whipcords or were they still in his hand?

Jesus may have still been in a testy mood when Nicodemus showed up at the house where he was staying. Our Lord certainly gave his fellow Pharisee a hard time of it. All this born again talk.

Our ears hear the words “born again” and we get skeptical. We understand that phrase is a metaphor – no one crawls back from whence they came. But, we hear that phrase and those of us in mainstream Christianity bristle. I’m not one of THOSE people. That’s just weird.

Well, maybe not. What if we hear the story in another way. Let’s listen to the Nicodemus story in a more modern setting – one we might better identify with – one in our own backyard.

It’s late January in the Diocese of Washington. Just as the diocesan convention is getting underway at the National Cathedral, a man appears in the registration area. You could tell from his appearance that “he wasn’t from around here.” He had a couple of his friends with him.

The whispering began almost immediately. Wasn’t that the guy from YouTube? You know, Joshua Davidson, the guy who was healing people on the streets and leading online Bible studies? His teachings were amazing and everything he did went viral.

He asked someone at the tables if he could find a place to pray with his friends. Not being familiar with the nooks, crannies, and chapels of the cathedral, the registration volunteer said that the cathedral was closed because of convention and he would need credentials to enter.

That's when the trouble started.

"NO!" screamed Joshua. "NO, it's not okay to keep people from prayer. The sign says it's a house of prayer, not a meeting venue!" And before we knew it, the nametags, pencils, and ballot sheets were in the air. He grabbed a power cord from the closest computer and raced up the side aisles like some holy Indiana Jones, taking out the vendor tables as he went.

Cathedral security got to him just before he made it to the dais where the bishop was about to convene convention. His friends had vanished in the chaos. The last thing we saw was him being led away by the DC police.

Later that night, Joshua was released into the custody of Canon Nikki DeMoss, a member of the cathedral staff, who'd posted bail. She escorted Joshua to her car hurriedly. To conceal her identity, she was in mufty..no collar and wearing a hoodie.

"Thank you," Joshua said. "Why did you come in the dead of night to get me out?"

*"If the dean knew I was doing this, I'd never hear the end of it." Nikki replied. "You have no idea what a hornet's nest you stirred up today, Joshua. If there's one thing about the Episcopal Church, it's that everything is to be in the right and proper order."*

Joshua looked at Nikki, tilted his head, and said "You need to enter the church through a new door."

*"Say what? What new door? Those huge doors have been there for decades. There's no way to make a new door in the cathedral. It's impossible."*

“Impossible.” Joshua said. “Spring comes each year out of the winter cold wearing a cherry blossom tiara. You’re paying for earthquake repairs selling Lego bricks!

Nothing is impossible.

“If everything is decent and in order, it’s difficult for the Spirit of God to move.

The Spirit seeks the lost and the broken, whether that is an institution or an individual. The Spirit touches us and helps us see our lives in different ways, through different lenses. Enter the church with a new perspective, Nikki.

“Don’t enter the door because you think you’re required to. Coming to church doesn’t save you. You were saved long ago. Grace is given as a gift. You just need to be reminded of that.

“Don’t enter the door because you think you need to do something. Enter the door because this sacred space is set aside for you to be quiet and remember that God loves you and because of that love you ARE something.”

*Nikki was confused. “But what about the whole ‘send us out to do those things God asks us to do’ thing. Don’t people need to come to church to get pumped up to go do acts of charity and mercy?”*

Joshua countered, “No, Nikki, look at it differently. The things God asks of us are those things that we are already doing. People are called to be parents and siblings. People are called to teach, seek justice, gather communities together, or discover and learn more about God’s creation. Our callings are to do those things as people of God.”

*“Are you saying we shouldn’t do acts of charity and mercy?” Nikki questioned.*

“Of course not,” said Joshua. “I’m just saying that seeing your life as calling is a perspective many people have lost. I think you’ll find that when you approach each stage of your life as being called to live differently, you’ll know when it’s time to take on more acts of mercy. To everything there is a season.”

*They arrived at the place where Joshua was staying. “Take care,” Nikki said, as Joshua got out of the car. “Remember, please don’t tell anyone I was here.”*

“Thank you, Nikki. Your secret is safe with me.” Joshua replied.

As she drove off, Nikki connected her Nano to the car’s speaker system and selected ‘random’. The device sorted through her ecclesiastical music choices and began to play: *For God so loved the world.*

“That’s odd,” Nikki thought. “He called me by name. But, I never introduced myself. Oh. My. God.”