

## SERMON FOR MARCH 12, 2017

Who knew that Frederic Nietzsche, Nicodemus, Jesus, and I would end up in the same sermon? Who knew? And who knew that it would be chaos that drew us together? That's right, chaos.

Now my part is small, so I'll start there. I have read some of Nietzsche's philosophy, and must admit that I have grasped less than I have read. I catch glimpses of his thinking and am intrigued. But his mind is way more than my mind, so for me, a glimpse is a victory.

He has written a lot about creativity and sees our capacity to create as holy. He is a great believer in the necessity of chaos in the creative process. The mind and the imagination have to swirl and turn, collapse and rise up, see and be mystified if something beautiful is to come into being. Creativity does not come so much from linear thinking. Other good things do-like organization, or management, or accountability, or order. We need those good things to survive. But those good things can make creativity stumble.

Several years ago, I came across a quotation from Nietzsche's writing that was printed on a fridge magnet. It read "one has to have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star." I didn't think twice about buying it and when I am in a panic at sermon time, and experience and spirit are madly dancing in my imagination and I don't know where truth is and Sunday is close, I think of that quotation and try to let myself swirl in the becoming of it all.

Congregations deserve a dancing star.

I give myself as freely as I can to the chaos of creating because I know that my best doesn't come from the times when I think I know where I am going and what I am doing. My best comes from chaos.

Nicodemus was my chaos this week. I thought a lot about the guy. I have admired him over the years, the Pharisee who saw something in Jesus that he had to know more about. He sneaked into Jesus' presence under the cloak of the night to pursue his questions and to find his answers. That is still part of my understanding of this story.

This year, with Lent as shadowland, I wondered what Nicodemus' shadow was. His world saw him as a leader, a religious leader, one of the men who gave their lives to their faith. Nicodemus was one of a company of Pharisees who encouraged the Jews to keep the Law of Moses with all its 613 mitzvahs. People turned to the Pharisees for teaching and encouragement. And in the religious system of the day, the Pharisees were the Law of Moses "police," the ones who monitored the obedience that helped maintain the identity of the Jews as the people of God.

Think for a minute about Nicodemus in those "Pharisee" terms. His life was about rules, and the orderly keeping of the rules of faith. His life was organized around the Jewish religious practice and if Nicodemus were keeping the people obedient to the rules of faith, you can bet your bottom dollar that Nicodemus himself was obedient to the letter of the law. Everything about him was the opposite of the chaos needed to birth a dancing star.

The ordered, structured Nicodemus heard about the spirited Jesus, in many ways the opposite of the Pharisee. Jesus respected the law. After all, he was a faithful Jew. But he was very aware of the limits of the law. The big limit that we see over and over again is the boundary between keeping the law and being compassionate. The law says that there is to be no work on the Sabbath. It is the holy day to rest as God rested after creating. By and large, Jesus kept this law. But when it was Sabbath and someone was suffering and needed to be healed, love was more essential than the rule book. When spirit moved Jesus to heal, that is exactly what he did.

Being led by spirit is categorically different than obeying a set of rules, even if keeping the rules is religious practice. Jesus says spirit-wind blows where it wills. Over spirit, we have no control. It is the chaos out of which we create a spiritual life, out of which we create loving connection, within which we know the power of the holy.

In the world, Nicodemus lived order. It is how others knew him and how he knew and understood himself. It was his logical mind that served him well as a Pharisee but that same mind could not imagine that a human, once born, could be born again.

To Nicodemus' credit, once he saw spirit at work in Jesus, wanted to know more. He came to Jesus longing to engage with that which was hidden in himself, the wild, the uncontrollable, the creative, the healing, the unbounded

spirit that was not in the Pharisee zone. His goal, which, of course, is our goal, is to befriend what is hidden and let it balance what the world sees and knows.

I think it was spirit energy and creativity that was hidden as part of Nicodemus' shadow. Jesus certainly zinged in on spirit in his meeting with the Pharisee and brought into the light the power of spirit and what it requires to live by spirit. Jesus offered the holy to Nicodemus, the chaotic and wild wind of the spirit. He offered Nicodemus all the possibility that spirit presents and invited the Pharisee into wind-swept life of God.

Nicodemus was challenged by the possibility of his life birthing a dancing star. Maybe more than challenged. Nicodemus was overwhelmed by what Jesus offered him. He was so overwhelmed by the wind blowing where it will that he brought all his logic to bear on the chaos of the spirit. How can I be born of spirit when I have already been born from my mother? Don't tell me, Jesus, that I have to make myself small, and crawl back into the womb so that I can be born again. Great rationality for a Pharisee, but not much liberation for creative chaos. Spirit nudged Nicodemus, but Nicodemus kept his spirit receptors hidden behind his logic. Ironically, Nicodemus' hiding under the cover of night becomes a metaphor for what he hides in his shadow. Living in the light is a risk, and it takes courage to do it.

Each of us has his/her own table of contents for what is hidden in the shadow part of our personality. I wonder how many of us have the chaos necessary for spirit-life hidden away. I wonder how many of us, in our ordered

and scheduled and duty-bound lives, would let spirit out of its shadow-box so that we could birth a galaxy of dancing stars.

Annette Dekker wisely told me that when we own, name, accept what is hidden as shadow, then we are born again. Jesus invites us there and born again to spirit possibility is where many of us want to be. Just imagine the night sky full of dancing stars.