

“Night Light”  
John 3:1-21  
May 30, 2021  
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Does anyone remember their night light?

Mine was square and had a picture painted on it. / I don't remember what it was a picture of, but I remember the glow. / It gave off just enough light so that I could make out the outline of the bed frame and the window and the blankets on my bed.

I don't remember when I stopped using it. / At some point I stopped being scared of things lurking in the dark.

But lately I have been glad for the night light at the beach house. / Mostly because it helps me not trip on the way to the bathroom. / But maybe somewhere there is still a bit of uncertainty too - - about that darkness. / The darkness of an unfamiliar house.

Supposedly a nightlight is a way to address fear, and help a child fall asleep.

As an adult I usually prefer it be as dark as possible to help me fall asleep.

Maybe children are more in touch with their fear than adults.

Imagine a daughter asking her dad: “Can I keep the night light on”?

Trying to wean her from the light - - he tries this one:

“The night light will just help the monsters see you better in there”.

The comment - - doesn't help.

Maybe there is just something about monsters.

Maybe no matter what age we are - - there are things we want to be saved from.

The center of this morning's story from John's gospel is about being saved.

According to John's gospel, the Son of God was sent into the world, so that:

“The world might be saved through him”

As I read that familiar line this year I find myself wondering what we might want to be saved from. / I can think of LOTS of possibilities. / From politics to violence to sickness...

Is there anything you want to be saved from?

And what is it about this life - - that the central thing Jesus does for us is - - save us.

Is this life - - and are we - - really that - - in need of saving?

Maybe lately it seems more like we are.

Being saved is a fairly passive thing. / It happens to you.

But the gospel DOES call believers to act too.

We are called to reject evil deeds.

And one way that evil is described is a love for DARKNESS instead of LIGHT.

The Gospel of John BEGINS with the image of light too - - in chapter one.

According to John - - light - - is not overcome by darkness.

But maybe we are also called to help - - overcome.

I think John's gospel challenges us to consider how we can do that.

How can we help love overcome hate?

How can we help lies overcome truth?

How can we help - - overcome - - the monsters?

Speaking of monsters lurking in the night...

Does anyone remember that movie, Monsters Inc.?

In the movie, an energy crisis is looming and children's screams provide enormous energy and so the screams are harvested. / Harvesting them is not good for the children because they have to be scared all the time - - but what do you do - - when you need energy?

Well - - in the movie - - it is discovered that laughter provides even MORE energy.

How can we help laughter overcome fear?

How can we help save - - even those so-called monsters?

Well, these are the kinds of questions that I think led Nicodemus to seek out Jesus.

In this morning's gospel reading, Nicodemus goes to visit Jesus - - and asks questions.

Jesus responds with some questions too - - at first.

And then Jesus gets around to that line about being sent as God's son - - to save.

At the beginning of this whole encounter we are told that the TIME of DAY was NIGHT.

Verse 2 says: "Nicodemus came to Jesus - - by night"

A lot has been made of that line over the years. / Nicodemus was a teacher who appears to be a non-believer so his is a bit in the dark - - and maybe doesn't want other orthodox Jews to see him visiting Jesus - - so he goes under the cover of darkness.

In any case - - he is looking for something.

Nicodemus has questions - - and seems to want something.

Are there things in his world that he wants to overcome?

Are there things Nicodemus wants to be saved from?

Maybe there are.

The Nicodemus story leaves us with questions.

It also leaves us with this monumental assurance that God is not out to condemn us.

The gospel of John is all about contrasts and dualities.

Light and darkness...

Love and hate...

Good and evil...

And here - - saving and condemning

So it's not JUST that Jesus is sent to SAVE us.

It's that Jesus was sent NOT to condemn us - - but rather to save us.

It wouldn't be hard to imagine a DEMEANING way to save someone. / For example:  
they are so weak and helpless and needy - - that - - I in my infinite awesomeness - - stooped  
down so save their sorry self.

That's NOT what the gospel says.

God sent Jesus to become LIKE us.

And in doing that - - NOT to condemn us - - but to save us.

Are there things about humanity that need saving?

Yes there are.

Are there questions that we don't know how to answer?

Yes there are.

Is there evil and hatred and general ickyness?

Yep - - there is.

But can we overcome that?

Can we?

Yes we can!

Jesus was sent to save us - - to call us to good deeds - - and to be light in the darkness!

The question for us is: What does that mean for you and for me?

Can we live as saved people?

And what would that mean for our lives?

This is the Sunday we call: Trinity Sunday.

That means that we think about the many ways of describing God.

God can be described as the creator who said “let there be light”!

AND - - God can be described as the Son - - who gave his life as the ultimate act of love.

AND - - God can be described as the Spirit that blows like the wind - -

and leads us to a rebirth into - - eternal life.

There is no place in scripture that refers to “the Trinity”.

But every piece and part of the Trinity are there.

We just have to put the Trinity together.

We have the pieces.

We have good questions.

We just have to put it all together - - and live accordingly.

Maybe you don’t think there are monsters - - and you don’t feel the need to be saved.

I would suggest that if that is the case - - you may yet change your mind.

Nicodemus disappears from this story - - but seems to have changed his mind later.

After all he shows up again at the crucifixion of Jesus.

It is reported in John Chapter 19.

That’s a pretty bold act for a non-believer.

Unless he changed his mind...

I do think there is monstrous behavior - - and situations in need of saving.

The violence between Palestine and Israel seems like an unsolvable question.

The division between liberals and conservatives in this country seems to have become a violent and dangerous fight - - instead of a disagreement over ideas.

Racism and how we respond seems to be fraught with failures.

Looking further back, Elie Wiesel wrote the book “Night” after WW2.

As a Jewish child he survived the horrors of Nazi concentration camps.

The book begins with a description of this young Jewish boy visiting a synagogue at night - - to ask questions of his Rabbi - - kind of like Nicodemus.

But he is captured and in Auschwitz and Buchenwald - - nighttime becomes a horror.

He writes:

“I shall never forget that night - - the first night in camp - - which has turned my life into one long night - - seven times cursed - - and seven times sealed.”

There is no night light - - for that.

Unfortunately - - there are too many other examples - - of human cruelty.

Is there anything you think we need to be saved from?

What about this life - - is in need of saving?

Whatever you answer - - remember the words of John:

The Son was sent - - so that the world might be saved.

That is God's heart.

Maybe - - if we take that in - - we will see the light.

Amen