



Sunday, 8 March 2020 – 2nd Sunday of Lent
Sermon for 10.00am Eucharist at St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
Reading: St John 3: 1-17
Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

In the witness stand

I'm Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. To put that into a Guernsey context your usual senior court is the Royal Court with the Bailiff sitting together with the Jurats. Above that is the Court of Appeal, the next level up is the judicial committee of the Privy Council or in other words the Supreme Court that's the equivalent of the Sanhedrin.

The evidence

I was in a quandary. I'd heard Jesus preach, teach and seen the result of his miracles, frankly no one could do that unless they were a Teacher from God. I'm seriously considering that he is the Messiah but I'm confused. Jesus certainly isn't a pushover I've seen my fellow Pharisees engage him in deep theological debate but Jesus always answers them with great knowledge and discernment. Yet with the poor, the vulnerable, the children, the sick and suffering, basically, all the ones that society forgets he offers such merciful acts of kindness. He's unlike the Messiah I had been taught would come. So, I went to meet Jesus with an open mind to hear from him one-to-one. I was afraid to be seen by my cohort so I went to him by night. He engaged me in conversation but, at first, I was utterly confused. How on earth could anyone be reborn? He was patient but when he said 'Are you a teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand?' I realised that I was looking at things from the wrong perspective.

Seeing from a fresh perspective

Jesus changed tack talking to me in legal terms, so that I was on familiar ground and I could make an association between scripture, the law and his fresh way of interpreting it. He told me I was judging things from an earth-bound perspective but he was testifying from first-hand visual evidence of a divine nature. He spoke so authoritatively that I could then understand scripture and the Law with broader vision. I had always thought that when the Messiah came, he would condemn the world but here was Jesus overturning my entrenched views. He explained that God does not want people to perish but have life in all its fulness in his eternal kingdom. If people are to be redeemed, however, he warned it would be through the death of God's Son.

Considering the evidence

Similar to your Jurat's withdrawing after hearing the evidence of a case to consider their verdict, Jesus had given me much to mull over. I went home but I'm sure you would like to know what happened next. You can of course read all about it in the Gospel of John but here's the highlights. A few weeks later whilst sitting in the Sanhedrin there was much heated argument about Jesus and his ministry. The most vociferous were urging that Jesus should be arrested and put to death. I stood up and said that no one should be condemned without having a fair trial to explain themselves.

There's none so blind as them that won't see

Sad to say, the vociferous were not to be silenced and they started scheming trumping up false charges against Jesus. They caught Pilate in a weak moment and before I knew it, they had him condemned to death by crucifixion. I knew then that everything Jesus had said to me had come true. I had no doubt that he was the Son of God, who had become the Son of Man for our redemption. I was a witness to the truth.

Standing up to be counted

I then did something unthinkable compared with that dark night sometime previously. Whereas people will support a popular leader, how many will show their allegiance to a condemned, crucified man? I did. I went with Joseph of Arimathea to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Together we took him down from the cross and laid him in Joseph's own unused tomb. I'd stopped stumbling in spiritual darkness into the light of God's redemptive grace and I was no longer afraid.

Life in all its fullness or a half-life?

That was Nicodemus' story but what about us? Fear, is an emotion that we all experience. Most often it is not fear of the known but fear of the unknown. Perhaps fear of an awaited diagnosis of an illness or fear of advancing old age. Will I cope? How long will I live? All understandable thoughts, however, fear can make us prisoners in our skin until we reach the point of paralysis of action and thought. Nicodemus showed that there comes a point when we need to face the evidence, the difference between human thought and judgment versus the loving support of God. Nicodemus turned from living in fear to living with courage.

Trusting God's promises

This Lent let us examine which is our predominant emotion fear or courage? If we trust God's promises to be with us each step of the way we need not live in fear, for he will support us through the trials of life and defend our souls from adversity until we too see him face-to-face.

Amen