

“A Night Time Visit”

(Based on John 3:1-17 and Trinity Sunday)

There is never a great time to go to the Emergency department at the hospital. It is even harder when it is your child and you need to go because they are in pain. There is no choice. You go. You will wait. You hope it may be a shorter time because it is nighttime, but there is also less staff. You know that regardless of the time of night or the line up ahead you will go. It is a time of crisis. You go.

Marsha and George stand on the doorstep of their neighbour's finally after months of waiting to see each other, the vaccinations are done and the okay is given. They are so looking forward to the door opening. They just want to have a face to face conversation with good friends. There is something about an evening chat with friends. It has been worth the wait.

The other night for the Victoria Day weekend a group of neighbours near our house decided to buy a few fireworks and let their kids and grandkids have a little fun. Lauren was watching out her window to see the lights and the colours. Then she told us an

unexpected thing happened. One of the fireworks didn't go up. It didn't fizzle out either. It went straight out and under one the neighbour's cars. Suddenly she saw sparks and colours from underneath the car. Thankfully that was the only surprise of the night!

This past week we were invited to watch a lunar eclipse. It wasn't great in our area. It was more visible and time friendly out West and in the Pacific Ocean region. It was interesting to see the pictures emerge this week on Facebook, Instagram and in the newspaper. They captured a series of moments when the moon was transformed from being fully visible to its many stages of the moon before returning to being full again. The night sky offered moments of change for those who stayed up and could see them!

“Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus[a] 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.” 3 Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you,

no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

I am not sure why Nicodemus's coming by night always grabs me. I think all started with someone once saying did you notice that Nicodemus came at night. That strikes me as significant. I wonder why? I guess I have wondered why ever since. It stuck me it could be that Nicodemus was having a crisis of faith moment. He needed to catch up with Jesus. It was like an emergency room visit. It just needed to be done. It was calling out to him.

Perhaps it was because Nicodemus had come to like Jesus' ways of expressing and communicating life. He wanted just some time to talk like friends do or potential friends might over a cuppa and relaxed in the coolness of the evening.

Nicodemus' arrival at night might be like the firework going sideways. It didn't make sense. It caused sparks. It invited us to wonder why and what else might take place.

Or perhaps the encounter of Nicodemus with Jesus was to set off a series of reactions like a lunar

eclipse. It was given to us to notice the moments of the encounter, and see what transformations might follow.

All of these seem possible. Probably on any given day one will feel more true than another. Perhaps you can think of another reason why Nicodemus may come at night? Protect his reputation. To make the encounter less political. Because Jesus was hard to track down. 😊 You see there may be reasons for Nicodemus to meet up with Jesus at night just like there may be many reasons we are drawn closer to Jesus in our living – a crisis, a need to talk, a surprise like a death, illness or a move to a new town!

What might also be interesting to notice is that Jesus didn't really care the reason why Nicodemus arrived at night, only that he did. Jesus sensed that Nicodemus came with more of a question than he first asks. So Jesus began to move him through some transformation moments.

“You must be born again or from above or with the Spirit.” Jesus challenges Nicodemus. Nicodemus it

is great to see you. So to the question of your heart, what you need to know is that your understanding of God has to change in order to fully grasp what the kingdom of God is about.

Nicodemus protests. Takes Jesus literally about being born again. But maybe it was more than that. He was struggling to embrace the notion that God may change him. Perhaps he grasped that being born of Spirit would mean he might have to make room for God to work in him in new or different ways. Nicodemus was stalling.

But Jesus pushed harder. He told Nicodemus he should know this already. He was a leader of Israel. Nicodemus is being called out, invited to search within himself, to remember who God is for him.

Then Jesus offers his part in the plan of transformation. He will offer himself to reveal God's love not only for Nicodemus but for the world. The full moon returns. Jesus is the light to the change that Nicodemus needs to make.

Jesus is the light to the change within ourselves...for God so loved the world.

Where do we need the light of Christ to shine in the night time visits of our living? Where might a rebirth of Spirit transform us?

A letter arrived in the mail this week. It was from Amy*. Amy wrote to thank us for helping while she is in jail. She had reached a couple of weeks earlier and we helped her with some items through the jail's canteen system. She also included a picture of her child that she is now separated from. Amy has had many issues in the time I have known her. Her words of promise have become empty to me. But Amy has found this time in jail her wake-up time. She is scheduled to go to a rehab time after her jail sentence. She is hopeful her mental health issues and her addictions issues will be addressed. She looks forward to being reconnected with her little girl. Her night time visit to the Milton jail is creating sparks of new life for her. God is speaking now into her life in a greater way.

Cliff Elliot, a United Church saint and minister of much renown in his day, use to have a radio spot on CFRB in Toronto. He collected some of them into a

book called Snapshots. He was one he shared about cottage life...

“With a summer cottage there is – at least in my experience – always something that needs fixing. For two years I had a plumbing problem. I couldn’t keep up the water pressure.

“There’s a leak somewhere,” the plumber said. “Have you looked under the cottage?”

Under the cottage? Elliot was shaking his head. His cottage sits flat on the ground. How would he ever get under it! But he said lying flat on his stomach he was able to shine a flashlight under the cottage, between the supports and the ground. And after a lot of squirming, there is was – a break in the line, squirting merrily away.

He conceded there was nothing to do but dig – to dig a space deep enough to crawl under the cottage. So that’s what he did. The ground was sticky clay, filled with roots and rocks. He jokes he nearly lost his religion along with his temper. But finally he managed to wriggle to the spot of the problem.

He felt so victorious lying there in the dark, in the mud and the clay, alongside the spouting leak. He had found his problem. He fixed it. When he crawled out and turned on the pump, the water pressure had returned! What joy!

Cliff Elliot must have had a bit of this night time visit in mind with Jesus because he ended with this thought,

“That’s where God keep pushing us. God says, “Have you looked underneath? Have you looked deep inside yourself? Have you dug deep down into your own heart? Don’t be afraid. I am telling you – there is more joy over one person who has the courage to look inside than over a hundred people [who tell the plumber to do it.]” (Adapted p. 54 Snapshots by Clifford Elliot)

A Night time visit invites us, challenges us today, to make space for the Spirit to be reborn in us. For God so loved you...