

“Nicodemus Remembers”

(Imagine the lights in this room are turned off, shades drawn, as if entering the night)

You will have to forgive my wanting these lights of yours out.

It is an odd habit, I admit:

For a teacher to be fond of darkness,
For one whose vocation is the enlightening of others --
To prefer the shadows for myself.

That is what he noticed about me, too.

Although he didn't have to say so . . . At least not in the beginning.

But forgive me, again, for keeping you in the dark about me:

My name is Nicodemus.

At the time when I met Jesus, I was a man who basked in the public limelight:

As a Pharisee, honored for my moral rectitude;
As a ruler, respected for my "can-do" effectiveness;
As a teacher, regarded for my religious insight.

Why, my very name meant "conqueror of the people"!

And so was I raised:
To be one who stood out,
To be one singled out,

As all conquerors must be.

But such a place is terribly lonely,
And in such a place did I live . . . and into such a person did I become.

As a teacher, I feared to admit the limits of my knowledge.

For what student would trust me then?

As a ruler, I feared to reveal the failures in my decisions.

For what follower would heed me then?

As a Pharisee, I feared to show the lapses in my behavior.

For what colleague would stand by me then?

More and more I found myself driven into the comfort of darkness.

The sanctuary of not being seen,
And therefore not being judged.
The safety of hiding myself from others,
And therefore not being rejected.

And that is when and where I met Jesus.

In a time of darkness, in an act of hiding –
Lest I be seen, lest I be found. . . Or found out.

We had all heard of the works and wonders ascribed to this Rabbi:

Of water become wine at a wedding,
Of tables turned – and overturned – on moneychangers at Temple.
All in broad daylight! All seemingly without fear of being found out!
For all to see, for all to judge!
The students whom I taught were quite taken with his style.
The people whom I led were singly attracted to his boldness.
The Pharisees whom I consulted were shaken by his decorum.

And me? What did I think? What did I feel?

Intrigued, fascinated, challenged . . . and fear!
The fear of others learning too much of me.
The fear of my venturing too far with him.

So to others: I kept my interest in Jesus in the dark.

While to myself: I made my plans to meet him in the dark.
Where I was safe from their sight – and, hopefully, from his insight.

But while I came to Jesus in the cloaking of night –

I found myself illuminated by what seemed the light of God!
Accustomed to keeping my own life cocooned in the dark,
I had difficulty seeing at first in the light he brought.
Words of rebirth made no sense to a man my age.
How can one such as I re-enter the darkness of the womb?

Everything he said caught me by surprise:

It required time for the lens of my spirit to adjust.
Time to see a birth which is from above,
Time to perceive a Spirit who goes where she wills,
Time to focus on a God who loves by giving,

But even as Jesus spoke such words of light,

So too he spoke of darkness.

Darkness of the heart, which refuses light's gift.

Darkness of the spirit, which prefers evil's shadows.

That night's cold air chilled me less than his knowledge of darkness;

Jesus seemed to know its power . . . its purpose.

Only later, much later, would I understand why.

Not that I set aside all to follow him at that moment.

Light takes getting accustomed to, for eyes and spirits.

I came to him in the darkness of that night –

And I walked away from him while darkness still clung tight

But there is a light that will not go away, even as there is that Spirit who will not let us go.

His words stayed with me, worked inside of me . . .

Until those words were heard in a new light – and a new dark:

In Passover's night, word came of betrayal;

In the Council's haste, word came of condemnation.

In a sun's light failed, word came of his execution. And death.

Then. . . and only then. . .

Did his words of life spoken to me become words of life lived by me.

Then and only then,

Did my choice to meet him in darkness lead to my choice to serve him in the light.

When most others had forsaken him:

Seeking places to hide themselves,

Seeking darkness to cloak betrayals and fears of exposure –

I finally determined that life needed living in the light.

With another who reached the same conclusion,

A Joseph from the town of Arimathea:

We went to the cross. We took his body down.

We wrapped him in spice-laden linens.

We laid him in the tomb.

All in the light of day.

It was the least we could do to thank him,

Him who taught us life is lived IN the light,

As surely as it is lived BY the light.