

Good Friday
“Nicodemus Sneaking/Interring”
John 3:1-8, John 19:38-42
April 18, 2025
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Good Friday is from our Passion reading, John 19:38-42

“38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. 39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. 40 Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. 41 Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. 42 So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.”

So far the text...

Two men, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, working into the night to assure that Jesus’ body is honored and received a proper burial. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary also accompanied them and observed where Jesus was laid.

And now it was over. Life had left Jesus’ body. The Jews asked Pilate that the bodies on the cross be taken down because it was the Sabbath. Out of sight, out of mind. Done with this Jesus once and for all they thought. Let’s get on with the laws of the Sabbath, not believing that Jesus had just abolished them by His death. It is finished. Jesus has fulfilled the law. The proof is coming in three days. Just wait!

The Jews’ request was granted with the caveat of first breaking the legs of those who hung on the crosses. After breaking the legs of the two malefactors, the soldiers came to Jesus, but He was already dead. To make sure, Jesus was pierced with a spear.

Again, Scripture was fulfilled that not a bone in His body would be broken. And as another Scripture says, **“They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”**

Yes, they looked on Him whom they pierced. Ha! He saved others and He couldn't save Himself, said the people. But, after it was all over the centurion looked on Jesus and exclaimed that this was the Son of God. Jesus' disciples especially looked on Jesus in sadness. In secret, Joseph for he was a council member himself, went to Pilate and asked for the body.

Nicodemus helped carrying 100lbs of aloes. He was referred to in Scripture as “the one who came to Jesus at night.” That moniker stuck with him. For as a Pharisee himself, he wanted to learn about Jesus and talk to Him but without the other Pharisees knowing.

So, the two men took Jesus' body to a new tomb that Joseph had hewn out of rock himself, and no one had been buried there before. It was in the midst of a garden. You can imagine a beautiful, peaceful, serene burial place after ...so much brutality, mocking, hatred, suffering and death.

And in three days, Mary Magdalene will be thinking that she is talking to the gardener. Until Jesus speaks again. For life did come back to Jesus and we know He is alive!

Yes, Nicodemus heard Jesus speak of Himself being lifted up like Moses lifted up the serpent on the pole. But, Jesus assured Nicodemus **“that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

What a test of faith for Nicodemus! Trust in a dead Man's word? And yet by his very actions of devotion in burying Jesus, we see his trust in the Lord.

There is not a lot mentioned in the Bible about Nicodemus life, but he is sometimes called a defender of the faith. Why? Though he came in secret to Jesus, he also defended him before the council. The Pharisees were beside themselves that Jesus was not already seized, tried and killed. In John chapter 7, it was Nicodemus who spoke up and said, **“Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”**

Why would Nicodemus defend Jesus? Because he had received in faith Jesus' defense! First of course, he was chastened by Jesus for not knowing that a man must be born again by water and the Spirit. And humbled, he heard Jesus speak to him the greatest words of love a person can hear.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The Father gave His Son on the cross for the world! For Nicodemus! For his defense against his unrighteous failure to keep the pharisaical law. Jesus came to his defense and said that he would not perish but have everlasting life!

So, when Nicodemus defended Jesus before the ravenous pharisees who wanted Jesus arrested and finished off, Nicodemus had a moment like Martin Luther. “Here I stand, I can do no other.” I must defend the truth that this Man, Jesus, is innocent. And on the night of Jesus’ death, Nicodemus had to defend His body to the very end by helping lay it to rest.

Joseph too, as I mentioned was a member of the council, and he didn’t consent to the pharisees decision to arrest Jesus. He also had his “Here I stand, I can do no other moment”. Two defenders of Jesus...doing what others were unwilling to do...give Jesus an honorable burial.

How about you? Do you stand for Jesus and defend Him when others disparage Him. Do you defend the innocent from slander, unjust punishment? When you do it for the least of these, you do it for Jesus. Are you a defender of Jesus or do you sometimes go along with the mob? Jesus willingly went to the cross carrying our guilt and sin and weakness of faith.

But also like Nicodemus, we have all heard the good news about how Jesus has defended us through our baptisms. For we are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. And as Jesus was buried in the tomb, so He took all our sins with Him and they were buried...never to accuse us again! We are raised to newness of life as His followers and defenders of the faith!

It is indeed a Good Friday for us who hear again the Good News that Jesus came not to **“to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”**

You and I gather tonight to honor our Savior for what He has done. Joseph and Nicodemus showed great love to Jesus by serving Him and defending Him in the midst of danger. We too are called to be defenders of the faith in word and deed this Good Friday and always. For we have received the highest good, our salvation and eternal life! Thanks be to Jesus!

Like Nicodemus, we come to Him at night, and in the morning, and at midday to hear the Good News of the Gospel and proclaim His death and resurrection as defenders of the faith. Amen!

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)