

## Wimborne

### Psalm 98

<sup>4</sup> *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.*

<sup>5</sup> *Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.*

<sup>6</sup> *With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.*

Be still for the presence of the Lord  
The Holy One is here  
Come bow before Him now  
With reverence and fear  
In Him no sin is found  
We stand on holy ground  
Be still for the presence of the Lord  
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord  
Is shining all around  
He burns with holy fire  
With splendour He is crowned  
How awesome is the sight  
Our radiant King of light  
Be still for the glory of the Lord  
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord  
Is moving in this place  
He comes to cleanse and heal  
To minister His grace  
No work too hard for Him  
In faith receive from Him  
Be still for the power of the Lord  
Is moving in this place  
Be still for the power of the Lord  
Is moving in this place

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving**

As we join together in prayer we know that we are also separate. Some of us joining in the church and others at home. We thank you that, although separate, we are united as a church family. Thank you for the support we have received and have been able to give during these long months and for the work of all key workers who have kept us safe.

Thank you for the scientists working on vaccines and treatments which help us to be able to see light at the end of a long tunnel.

Thank you for the signs of new life around us, trees in leaf, flowers in the garden and birds with their young.

Thank you for light and darkness, sun and rain. Thank you for those who have led us in our faith, guiding us from darkness into light.

Most of all, thank you for the light of Jesus, who constantly offers us hope and new life.

Amen

### **Reading – John 3 v 1 – 17**

There are some people who drift in and out of our lives only once, sometimes for just a day or a week, sometimes for longer, but still just once. Then they, or we, move on and we never know what happens to them after that time.

The same is true of people in the Bible. Some we hear of only once, then it is as if they had never existed because we don't know what happened next.

The rich young man is one – did he just walk away from Jesus and live the life he wanted or did he reflect on what Jesus had said and return to him?

The Samaritan woman at the well, did she marry again or did she leave Jesus and live a life of chastity?

Zebedee (I can never say that name without going BOING – Magic Roundabout for those of a certain age) but he is a figure in the background, we know little about him.

But Nicodemus is different, we do know a little of what happened to him, or at least we know some of what he did next. This reading from John 3 is the beginning of the story of Nicodemus.

Even so, there are so many questions about the story, parts which are intriguingly missing and which we would like to have filled in.

We do know that he is a Pharisee, not only that but "a leader of the Jews". This means he was part of the inner and influential group, the Sanhedrin, an important person, just like your church stewards. Well, actually more important than that, more like being a member of the Cabinet. He was certainly one of the 'in crowd', the crowd who were becoming increasingly impatient and intolerant of Jesus because he was challenging their authority.

Despite this, Nicodemus came to see Jesus and chose to open a conversation with him about faith.

We do know that "he came to Jesus by night" – why? Why did John see fit to mention that?

There has been much speculation about that. Was he ashamed to come in daylight, or scared of what others may say if they saw him? Was it just the usual time for him to study the scriptures? Maybe he had been busy during the day or that he knew that fewer were clamouring for Jesus' attention at night.

I think it would be very easy to say that the reason doesn't matter but I think it does otherwise I don't think John would have mentioned it. It does matter because it helps us identify the Nicodemus who is mentioned on 2 other occasions, we know that it is the same person.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> time we hear of Nicodemus is in John 7

At this time the Pharisees and chief priests are becoming frustrated with Jesus and were pushing for him to be arrested for alleged blasphemy.

*<sup>45</sup> Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, 'Why did you not arrest him?' <sup>46</sup> The police answered, 'Never has anyone spoken like this!' <sup>47</sup> Then the*

*Pharisees replied, 'Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?' 48 Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But this crowd, which does not know the law—they are accursed. 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> before, and who was one of them, asked, 51 'Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?'*

So, Nicodemus spoke out boldly before his peers, reminding them of the law. Surely that would have been quite a dangerous thing to do as he just put his head above the parapet in supporting Jesus.

Then in John 19

*38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. 39 Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. 40 They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.*

“Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night”

We know that this member of the Sanhedrin was by then publicly demonstrating his commitment to Jesus, and doing so with aplomb (or at least with a vast quantity of expensive spices). Showing his support by providing the means for Jesus' body to be prepared for burial.

By this time Nicodemus was no longer lurking in the shadows but was being very open, brazen one might say. Presumably he was also prepared to accept the consequences of his actions, risking being rejected by his own people.

Nicodemus first came by night, then he came into the light, publicly showing his commitment to and care of Jesus.

I don't know about you, but I rather feel as if the last 14 months have been a bit night like. I described it once as if we have been in hibernation.

Churches closed, then, cautiously, opened, then closed, opened again, still cautiously.

We have tried our best to keep in contact and maintain worship by Zoom, video and send out sheets. Some of our folk will never return because of aging or change of circumstances, others now find it easier to worship at home because they are comfortable (coffee and slippers comes to mind), some people are still afraid to come out.

We shall have members who will slowly venture forward.

To a great extent we are emerging from night into day – or are we?

It seems to me that it is very easy for churches and individual Christians to be pretty much invisible. As Methodists we don't have the advantage of having chocolate box parish churches with neatly maintained churchyards. They are very easy to identify as being church and are so often nicely central to villages.

It is surprising how many people use our buildings for Keep Fit or Slimming World and never realise that the hall is part of a church, they often come in a separate entrance.

And what about us?

How often are we cautious when meeting strangers, maybe on holiday, do we admit to being in that strange bunch of people called Christians? Most Doctors and Clergy are very careful about admitting what they do in real life in those circumstances. Doctors because people will then ask them for advice and Clergy because people don't want to 'say the wrong thing' in their presence.

Nicodemus first met Jesus in the dark, at night, then he emerged from the dark into the light to defend and then care for Jesus – quite a journey.

So, what caused the change?

Well, initially, he met with Jesus, didn't just bump into him by accident but made a deliberate effort to meet with him. Then, he listened to what Jesus said. It must have been disturbing listening for him as it went against what he had been previously taught. The encounter may have lasted several hours, maybe he came back on other occasions to continue the conversation.

And the encounter changed him. Despite his misgivings about what Jesus was saying Nicodemus was, indeed, "born again".

I often worry about that phrase as it implies that it is a once for all experience but I suggest that we need to be continually reborn as we gain more understanding of our faith and make renewed commitments.

The question this morning is "Are we ready, both as individual Christians and as church, ready to be born again, to emerge from the dark into the light, proclaiming our commitment to Jesus for all to see and hear?"

Are we ready to let the light of Jesus shine through us and onto all those we meet as we proclaim that everyone can be born again as they commit their lives to Jesus?

Or do we prefer to stay in the dark, in the shadows, thus leaving others in the dark?

I don't think any of us know what churches are going to do as we slowly return to a degree of normal, whatever that might be, but I do know that God has not and will not give up on us. He still has a purpose for us. He wants us to be a light for people who don't already know Jesus. We are meant to shine our light, and believe me, we all have it.

Mark 4

*21 He said to them, 'Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket, or under the bed, and not on the lampstand?'*

Sometimes other people cover our light because of the way they treat us, sometimes we cover it ourselves for a great variety of reasons, but that is not how we are meant to be.

So, how are you going to shine your light? How are you going to shine the light on Jesus for others? How will this church shine its light in the surrounding community?

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
though the way be rough and narrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
when the crowds are turning violent?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
will you share your faith with the faithless?

We will walk the path that will cost us much  
and embrace God's love and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

I invite you to add your own prayers based on the following:

Places in the world where there is conflict

Places in the world where people are struggling to eat or access clean water

The response of governments to the pandemic

People who are feeling isolated and uncared for

People who are exhausted having worked through the pandemic

Our church and it's members

Concerns known to you

As we end our worship together I hope you know the following song:

This Little Light Of Mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
This Little Light Of Mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
This Little Light Of Mine,  
Yes, I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

The light that shines is the light of love,  
Lights the darkness from above,  
It shines on you and it shines on me,  
and it shows what the light of love can do.  
I'm gonna shine my light both far and near,  
I'm gonna shine my light bright and clear,  
where there's a dark corner in this land  
I'm gonna let my little light shine.

This .....

On Monday he gave me the gift of love,  
Tuesday peace came from above,  
Wednesday he told me to have more faith,  
And on Thursday he brought me the gift of grace.  
And then on Friday he told me "Watch and pray",  
And then on Saturday what to say,  
On Sunday he gave me the power divine  
To let my little light shine.  
This .....

## **Blessing**

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ our Lord  
And the blessing of God Almighty The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always  
Amen

