

From Curiosity to Vitality

John 3:1-10

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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He could have stayed home.

He could have not taken the risk.

He could have not allowed himself to wonder, to seek, to ask.

But, that isn't what Nicodemus did.

Rather, the writer of the Gospel of John tells us that Nicodemus sought Jesus out. He came to Jesus under the cover of night, likely avoiding certain risks, even as that choice created others. He came to Jesus, asking questions, even admitting what he did not understand.

Nicodemus brought his questions and his curiosities and he laid them at the feet of Jesus. And honestly, if we just read this story - even if we continue reading the full response John tells us Jesus had - we aren't really sure where this conversation left Nicodemus.

This story does not wrap up nicely, telling us that Nicodemus left and began to proclaim the good news of Jesus to everyone he met. Rather this story ends with Jesus talking and then the next chapter moves on, to another story about Jesus and his disciples.

But, if we are paying attention in the Gospel of John, we will find that Nicodemus shows up two more times. A few chapters later when many groups of leaders are having conversations about the possibility of arresting Jesus, Nicodemus speaks up and reminds them of the rights of the accused. He stands up for Jesus.

And, toward the end of the gospel, after Jesus' death, Nicodemus is with Joseph of Arimathea who claims Jesus' body. Nicodemus, there in the daylight, carries the materials that will be used to prepare Jesus' body for burial.

As Rev. Dr. S. Chapin Garner writes, "Curiosity led Nicodemus from darkness to light, from ignorance to understanding, from stagnation to vitality. If we want to not only imagine but experience vitality, all we need to do is steward our natural God-given curiosity. Accept invitations. Explore new places. Get to know different people. And when the spirit within us is piqued...trust that prompting is from the Lord, and get excited to not only imagine, but to experience, where we will be led!" (Disciples/UCC Resources - 2024 Stewardship Theme Materials | "Imagine Together").

Nicodemus did this. But he wasn't alone. In the Hebrew Bible, we see it happen time and time again. Ruth chose to imagine what would happen if she took the risk and went with her mother-in-law. She allowed herself to be curious about the possibilities that lay outside the usual expectations of her time, and in doing so she embraced not only a commitment to Naomi, not only her identity as a

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foreigner, but she became an ancestor of King David. Then there was Esther. Some might say Esther was in the right place at the right time. But more than just that, Esther chose to imagine a world in which she could make a difference for her people and in risking her life, she saved them.

The list goes on and on.

And in these as well as others in our contemporary lives we are reminded that when we are willing to step beyond fear, to live from a position of curiosity, to take risks for others, to be open to new possibilities, then we are invited to live more fully from a place of vitality, of energy, of possibility.

Last week in Bible Study, David Hudson who authored the book *A Diverse Community of Believers and Seekers*, which is a history of our congregation written for the occasion of our 150th anniversary made a comment that has stuck with me. He said that in writing First Christian Church's history he came to realize that we are not one church. Rather over the years we have been a thousand churches. And rarely has there been a time when we have not been up for a challenge.

Yes, our biblical ancestors have shown us what it is to be curious and brave and open. But so have our congregational ancestors. So have some of you in our midst today.

Right here in our congregation Sally Smith showed up for anti-war protests in order to be a supportive presence for young people who were rallying there.

John McKinstry, with this congregation's support, was blessing same-gender relationships before those marriages were legal in the state of Iowa.

Just last year several of our adults showed up downtown to stand in support alongside high school students who were standing against anti-trans laws.

As we look toward the year ahead and years ahead, are we ready to be curious?

Are we ready to ask big questions?

Are we ready to admit what we don't know?

Are we ready to be open to new ideas, to learn and grow and change?

Are we ready to take risks?

Are we ready to live in ways that don't just keep us comfortable but that prioritize others of God's children, especially those who have too often been pushed aside, those who have been oppressed, those who are in danger? May it be so.