



Abram, Nicodemus and the Unknown

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Lent 2

Genesis 12: 1-4a; John 3:1-7

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In today's readings first of Abram, then Nicodemus and Jesus we approach the unknown. Abram goes, no idea where or quite why but, on God's direction, he steps toward the unknown. Nicodemus comes at night to question Jesus, for there's something unknown about Jesus.

Nicodemus comes and asks, well, it's more of a statement, "We know 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." The signs thus far include changing water to wine, at a wedding in Cana, at his mother's insistence and driving the traders and money changers out of the temple. Driven by 'Zeal for God's house', according to John.

We can only assume Jesus' actions and passion have stirred something in Nicodemus. Nicodemus is brave, or perhaps foolish enough, to enquire further. Even though a religious teacher, Nicodemus is willing to press the edge of what he knows, of what God expressing might look like.

Jesus' response to Nicodemus is illogical, as if Jesus hadn't heard. We enter the repartee: "No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above" and Nicodemus' 'literalist response' is equally baffling, "can one be born again from his mother's womb?" Jesus and Nicodemus appear to talk past one another. Neither listening to nor understanding the other.

We assume Jesus and Nicodemus to be people of integrity. Each has a storyline, a way they make sense of the world, of the way things are. We know both are Jewish, even so they're not meeting each other, as if their storylines run parallel.

We each story our lives to make sense of who we are and of our world. It's reasonable and perfectly sensible that we do so. Our storylines reveal how we understand the world. They'll change as we age and experience new things, but I'd contest there's some foundational aspects grounding them, perhaps certain values or orientation. Oftentimes our story resonates with people we're in relationship with, which may be the reason for our relationship.

Throughout life we've met and known people quite different to ourselves, with a worldview foreign to our own. Despite such difference we've usually managed to find enough in common to muddle along. However, things seemed to have changed after the Covid pandemic. Forced to isolate from one another, people connected online. Connectivity through unregulated social media platforms led to alternative interpretations of reality, to the growth of what's now coined conspiracy theories. For those who engaged, such alternative **is** real, even as those not engaged remain sceptical.

We no longer live with Covid restrictions. However, ways of relating learned and legitimated in that time seem to continue. Unbridled rhetoric, it being acceptable to speak and act with temerity, without respect for or recognition of another's humanity, without responsibility for the impact or consequence of such speech or act. Sadly, we hear such rhetoric in the words of leaders of nations. We see it in decisions made and actions taken by those in leadership, exercising their authority as power **over** others. Leaders elected to office by people who entrusted them with their care.

There's always been a mix of many storylines, aligned, parallel or conflicting. But increasingly our stories and we ourselves are moving apart, away from one another. More polarised in the way we think things need and should be done.

I have a storyline, a worldview, sure it changes and adapts, but there's an orientation from which I engage, through which I interact. We all do, an orientation often implicit until made explicit when tested. Tested by encountering people with storylines that express values and priorities opposite to mine. For me those who espouse the necessity to decide and act for self-protection in ways that destroy the lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable. A type of storyline that, to me, denies, acts to destroy the life and dignity of another. I find it incomprehensible, for it contradicts things I value and hold dear. I'm repelled. I want to distance myself, cast out people espousing such view, make them other. Ironically, I want to deny them the dignity of shared personhood.

But, if I'm able to discern through the haze of my visceral response, I **can** see **my** way of storying, of what appropriate action and decision look like, may be as repellent to them as theirs is to me. It's as if we inhabit parallel universes, we talk past each other, unable to hear, much less listen to one another.

The stories we make up, our view of the world we consider right and valid, we create them, make them up to suit us. They're only as real as we insist them to be. Can we be sure our story, evolving from our experience is anymore valid than the story of someone whose story runs opposite to ours?

Yet surely we're more than the stories we tell. Would our identity be forfeit, should the world be different from what we imagined? Have we come to use them to protect ourselves from others, from ourselves? To shore up a sense of certainty, of our life having

meaning and purpose. To avoid the uncertainty wrought by all that's unknown, the fears, frustrations and desires that arise in us. Fearful of allowing the unknown too close for we know not where it will lead.

If we were to accept our world view as malleable, not fixed, would we disappear? Or would it open us to encounter our world and ourselves more deeply. From each other's stories learn what being human in the world looks like, more deeply, wider, greater than our singularity, our preferred associations. **Through** the difference of others see more fully the complex richness of life. The unknown to us that we fear may not be the same unknown to someone else.

I acknowledge this won't necessarily 'fix' our world, our polarising differences, make our world smooth and ordered and aligned, but who decided that's the way it's meant to be? We pin our hopes on creating a story that organises and makes sense of the world for then, surely, we will know who we are, our purpose, the reason for our existence. But the world is mixed, muddled and messy, dangerous, frightening and delightful, without clear reason, explanation or tidy solutions. Like it or not this is the nature of existence into which we come, are born and become aware and from which we go, we know not how.

"When we nurture the wisdom of wonder,
We begin to move differently through the world.

We speak slower.

We listen longer.

We approach one another with the curiosity of kinship

Rather than the certainty of correctness.

We remember that *not knowing* is not a failure

- It's an invitation to intimacy with mystery."¹

¹ <https://www.ourcollectivebecoming.com/p/monday-meditation-838>