

Nicodemus visited Jesus at night.
Why the middle of the night?
Maybe he didn't want his colleagues and friends
to know he was interested in what Jesus said.
Maybe it was the only time he could get Jesus one-on-one,
away from the big crowds.
Whatever the reason,
Nicodemus has the kinds of questions
that come up *for us* at night, too.
Questions that surface
In the quiet,
when our mind is supposed to be resting,
but starts to spin.

At night, we too, hear the soft whispers of our questions.
They start with practical matters:

- Did someone let the dog out?
- Are the kids' lunches packed for school?
- When am I going to get to the grocery store this week?
- I forgot to call the plumber for that dripping faucet, again!

Soon, they start to sound like Nicodemus' question for Jesus.

- Lord, how can these things be?
- How can I go back to that same job tomorrow?
- How can my spouse be so sick?
- How can I stay in this relationship any longer?
- How can God ever forgive me?
- Has God forgotten me?

What are your God questions that
you only dare to ask in the dark, quiet of the night?
(Pause)

Many of us are like Nicodemus.
We trust some things about God,
but there are many things
that have us asking, "how can this be?"

We Tend to think of faith as a done deal.

You either have it or you don't.
Have you accepted Jesus?

Done.

Are you born again?

Done

Are you baptized?

Done.

Are you confirmed?

Done.

And yet, our trust in God is often like the wind.
Sometimes it's a constant, pleasant breeze.
Sometimes it's as strong as a tornado.
Sometimes our trust in God just stops.

Nothing moves. Nothing happens.

We don't notice it.

It's like it's not even there.

It doesn't move me or anyone else.

Years ago, the forest service launched
a public ad campaign about forest fires.

Smoky the Bear wanted your campfire out.

Dead Out.

Smoky the Bear knew that when the wind blew
over those seemingly cold ashes

A spark could be fanned into a flame,
and suddenly,
the whole forest is ablaze.

Sometimes when we ask these night questions,
We wonder, and even fear, that **our faith** is dead out.
Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus shows us that asking
The "God, How can these things be?" questions
Are a sign that God's Spirit
Is blowing through our lives,
To set our hearts, minds and faith on fire.

When we give up asking God the questions,
When we stop taking our fears and failures to God,
then, maybe our faith **is** on the verge of dying out.

In the light of day,

We try to push these night questions back to the shadows.

Yet they keep burning
because they usually arise out of things
that we cannot completely control.

God's Spirit is something we cannot control either.
It comes and goes like the wind
and it blows whenever, wherever, however, and on whomever,
it chooses.

The thing about wind is that it moves things.
This past week, severe storms, winds and tornadoes
caused widespread damage across the Midwest.
In Memphis, Texas, winds reach over 114 mph.
Early Monday, across Kansas, North Dakota and Texas,
flipped cars and downed trees
littered neighborhoods where roofs had been torn from homes.
A man from Norman, Oklahoma said,
"I got up and then the wind just threw me back.
And I'm screaming,"
"It was like a blizzard inside the house."¹

Many of you know that the wind in Eastern Montana blows like crazy.
On one eastern Montana ranch,
Tumbleweeds blew from an unused field
into a fence.
until one day, the wind lifted the entire fence
into the air and blew **onto** the highway.

Wind moves things.
God's Spirit moves things.
To be born of water and the Spirit of God
Is to be moved constantly.
Moved from one way of faith and life to another.

When our night questions persist...
When we ask "God, how can these things be?"
Perhaps it's God's Spirit
trying to move us.
Like Moses lifting the snake pole in the wilderness,
God's Spirit is nudging us to look directly
at what is worrying us, even killing us.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/27/weather/winter-storm-us-monday/index.html>

The Spirit won't leave us with the questions.
The Spirit wants to move us to insights and decisions
that offer new birth, new beginnings,
new life, and new hope.

If you wonder if you can go back to that same job tomorrow,
maybe God's Spirit is moving you to a career change
or to go back to school

If you wonder how your mom can be so sick,
maybe God's Spirit is moving you
to say those things to her that you never said,
or take time off to be with her.

If you are wondering "How can I stay in this relationship any longer,"
maybe God's Spirit is prompting you to seek counseling and guidance.

If you wonder "How can God ever forgive me,
perhaps God's Spirit is moving you to hear Jesus say again,
"I did not come to condemn but to save."

If you wonder if God doesn't care,
perhaps God's Spirit is moving you
to trust that God so loves the world,
and that world includes YOU.

God's Spirit blowing through your life
means things are going to move and change

When is the last time God's Spirit moved you?

- When was the last time you changed your mind because of God?
- When was the last time you changed
what you said
or had you acted
toward parent, kids, spouse,
or **anyone at all** because of God?
- When was the last time
you changed your politics because of God?
- When was the last time you changed your job,
or what you do with your money because of God?
- How is God's spirit nudging your church?
- What is God's Spirit blowing you away from and
what is the Spirit carrying you towards?

God's Spirit is moving through
Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Cincinnati, Ohio.²
Since Hurricane Katrina in 2005,
the church has sent work crews to towns and homes
destroyed by hurricanes, tornadoes and other disasters.

The ministry started when their pastor Zorn, and his wife Cindy
changed their vacation plans
at the last minute to go to Port Charlotte, Florida
after learning that a church building had its steeple blown off.
relatives told them help was greatly needed.
Pastor Zorn and Cindy helped an elderly couple
who had their home damaged.
Cindy supported the wife,
who was the primary caregiver for her husband with dementia.

Since the Spirit first moved Pastor Zorn, Cindy, and then the congregation,
They have made 19 relief trips to places around the US damaged by natural disasters.
Pastor Zorn said, "When you get out of your comfort zone, God shows up."
They are in the process of planning a trip for June 2023.

The wind literally blew this congregation into mission and ministry.
God's Spirit moved them from their church building
out into the world of grief, hurt and need.

Nicodemus had been a man of deep faith for years.
but then, Jesus stirred up
all these questions for him.
Will Nicodemus stay where he is at
asking his questions in the dark of night.
Or will he let God's Spirit blow him
straight into the light?
Will Nicodemus see the Spirit nudging him
from one place to another?
What about you? And me?
And us as a church?

Filled with our own questions,
We follow in the footsteps of Nicodemus.
The Spirit, through the light of Christ,
Moves us out of the shadows,

² From Living Lutheran January/February 2023. P. 32.

To meet our questioning hearts

With heavenly things:

A God who does not condemn but cares for us
and calls us to move boldly in faith.

A love lifted up for the entire world
that heals and makes whole.

and God's Spirit who moves us
from the questions we have now
into Christ's reign of light and life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.