

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy... Amen...

I invite you all to close your eyes... And imagine an arial view of our church, now try as best as you can to pan up even more, revealing all of Wausau, and higher still to see the entire state of Wisconsin, and higher still to all of North America... and higher still to the planet earth...

Embrace this image of earth. Silently floating in the vacuum of space. The beautiful greens and blues, swirl around the globe... Revealing millions of pathways... Both physical paths and pathways through time...

Let us pray... O God, you have called us to ventures of which we cannot see the end, by paths never taken and through perils unknown. Give us good courage, not knowing where we go, to know that your hand is leading us wherever we might go; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen...

I invite you to open your eyes whenever you feel ready.

May you find good courage this week.

May courage shine its way into your spirit and may courage be the strongest when you need it the most.

Because the world, as beautiful as it is, can also be difficult and exhausting. And the world as lovely as it is, can also be filled with sadness, destruction, and fear.

Hardships that our early faith elders knew far too well.

And so, they cultivated sacred words and practices to fill themselves with good courage.

They lifted up their eyes to the hills, believing that their help comes from the Lord, Creator of heaven and earth.

They believed that God was the shade at their right hand, that God was the hand leading them, watching over their comings and goings.

And today's Gospel was about the comings and goings of one man who sought out Jesus.

A man who asked hard questions and a man who spoke up when he didn't understand something.

A man whose conversation brought forth one of the most popular bible verses of all time... "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

And so, for that, I say, thank you, Nicodemus...

And I would also like to say thank you to Nicodemus, because through his coming and going, he showed us it is okay when we are afraid...

And that even in our fears we can seek out and find Jesus...

Now if you are wondering if you missed something in the Gospel reading about Nicodemus's fear, you are not alone...

As it is not quite as evident to us today, as it was for the original hearers of this Gospel.

This Gospel came from a time in our history when society understood light and dark, and day and night, in a very specific way...

This is especially true in the Gospel of John... As the Gospel of John really embraces the light/dark imagery. Revealing through the Gospel another level of meaning.

For example, the original hearers would have had a different understanding of this Gospel right from the get go.

As a unique context is formed in the first two sentences, where it reads, "Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night..."

Night implies that Nicodemus was afraid. And the fact that he was a Pharisee further reveals that he was specifically scared to be seen with Jesus.

Because if he was caught with Jesus, by other Pharisees', he would be persecuted.

And yet, he found the courage to go, even if he was veiled in the darkness of night.

Once he finds Jesus, as we all heard, he engaged in a not so smooth and somewhat confusing conversation.

A conversation that is really getting at the importance of baptism and faith, without ever mentioning the word baptism.

Now perhaps, Jesus approaches the conversation this way, without using the term baptism, to show that there are multiple pathways to talk about baptism, inviting curiosity, wonder, and love into the night.

Further Jesus is embodying this love by physically being present with Nicodemus, by answering his questions and sharing the magnitude of God's love for the world.

The fact that this conversation takes place at night shows that the light of the world still meets us in the night.

Words that were similarly echoed from our psalmist today... The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night...

Why? Because God is there.

God is there despite your fears and in the midst of your fears. Christ is there in the darkness, in the things you do not know, in the things you cannot see, and in the mystery of life.

And Jesus brings this mystery to our attention by saying...

"The wind blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Revealing to us, that through baptism, we are born into God's Holy Mystery, allowing God to lead us in pathways unknown.

Pathways that we have yet to venture into as time pushes out in front of us.

A place where God not only watches over your comings and goings, but a place where God is already at.

Providing you with courage to embrace the unknown, and courage to embrace even what is known.

So, for whatever you have going on this week, this month, this year, and throughout your lifetime, may each one of you find good courage.

And may you also find the courage to be there for others in need. Inviting others to lift their eyes to the hills, while sharing that God is there in the midst of all our ventures.

And so, I would like to lift up the prayer of good courage, once more...

O God, you have called us to ventures of which we cannot see the end, by paths never taken and through perils unknown. Give us good courage, not knowing where we go, to know that your hand is leading us wherever we might go; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen...