



This was an extraordinary affirmation from someone recognised in the Jewish community as a Pharisee, a teacher of the Law, and it seems to indicate that a number of other Pharisees shared his thoughts. For, Nicodemus said, 'WE know you are a teacher who has come from God...', he did not say, 'I know you are a teacher who has come from God...' It's almost as though Nicodemus had been sent by a group of like-minded Pharisees to find out more.

A discussion unfolded in which Nicodemus wanted to better understand the phrase, 'Kingdom of God' and, Jesus suggested that to be in this Kingdom a person had to be 'born from above'. Nicodemus didn't understand, and so he asked how a person could be born physically a second time. Patiently, Jesus explained that a person becomes part of the Kingdom of God by water and Spirit.

It's not clear what Nicodemus thought in response because he is not mentioned again in John's Gospel until much later, when he came with Joseph of Arimathea to wrap the body of Jesus and place him in a tomb. At that point John describes Nicodemus as a 'secret disciple.' Clearly that conversation about the Kingdom of God, and the need for water and Spirit, had a lasting effect on Nicodemus.

In the book of Acts we often find water and Spirit mentioned in the lives of those who followed Jesus. Sometimes people were baptised with water and then received the Holy Spirit, while at other times people received the Holy Spirit, and were later baptised with water. In the Anglican Church we baptise children and adults with water, and in Confirmation a bishop lays a hand on the head of each candidate while praying, '*Strengthen, Lord, your servant with your Holy Spirit. Empower and sustain him, or her, for your service.*' It has been a great privilege to pray this prayer over many people since I became a bishop almost nine years ago.

Last Wednesday I had the great privilege of Ordaining a man called John Rolley in the Parish of Goondiwindi. In that service, as many clergy laid hands on John, I prayed, "*Send down the Holy Spirit upon your servant, John, whom we set apart by the laying on of our hands, for the office and work of a priest in your Church.*" It was a wonderful time of worship and commissioning, but the Holy Spirit was not only present in that moment. The Spirit was present in Word and Sacrament, in prayer and singing, and in the hospitality offered before and after the service. Surely the Spirit was also present with people as they drove home, and as they have gone on with their lives since then.

Inevitably, there are OCCASIONS when we have a sense of God's Spirit present in the midst of a conversation, a prayer, or an experience of some kind. But, there are also PLACES where we might have a particular sense of God's Spirit and they can be on mountains, by the beach, or under a particular tree. Celtic Christianity speaks of 'thin places' on earth where the sense of God, and God's Spirit, is more readily felt than in other places. I find

that there are some particular bars of instrumental music which when I hear them played, or play them myself, there is somehow an extraordinary sense of God.

I think we'd agree that the purpose of God's Spirit is not simply to make us feel good – whether God's Spirit is encountered in a solitary 'thin place', or in the midst of a crowd. I think it is given, granted, and gifted to help us live more faithful and godly lives; and to enable us, together with others, to bring healing, hope, and transformation. Healing, hope and transformation in local communities, in wider society, and in the world.

As we continue to travel this Lenten journey, may we each be a little like Nicodemus this week. Like him, may we seek to understand Jesus better, and be open to the Spirit of God in the midst of each day.

Amen